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DARK ROSALEEN.

DARK ROSALEEN.

BY

MRS. O'SHEA DILLON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

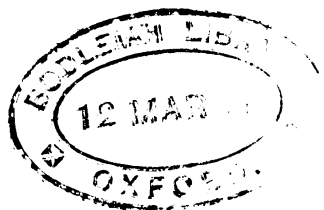
LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 8, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1884

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CHARLES DICKENS AND EVANS,
CRYSTAL PALACE PRESS.

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Part II.—The Brotherhood.

(Continued.)

DARK ROSALEEN.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD BEGGARMAN.

THE night after Mrs. Fogarty's party was wild and stormy. Within the village inn of Lusmore the careful postmistress was having a last look at the fastenings of doors and windows preparatory to going to bed. As she crossed the hall she was surprised to see her son, who, buttoned to the chin in a heavy overcoat, and with a soft cloth cap drawn low over his brows, had crept down the stairs in stealthy fashion with the intention of slipping out of the side door unnoticed by his mother.

"Why, Pat, you are not going out? It is past eleven o'clock."

"I'll be back in an hour," said he; "I

promised the traveller who got me the situation in Dublin to meet him about half-past eleven at the shebeen beyond Baltore."

"What a strange place for a business appointment! Why not have brought him here instead? But, Pat, you are ill. Do not go out," she added, with an anxious glance into the schoolmaster's pallid face.

"The air will do me good, mother. I will never get the better of the shaking that villain, Moore, gave me last night. He has made me the laughing-stock of the valley," he said, in a savage tone; "but I'll make some of them laugh at the wrong side of their mouths one day, never fear."

"You could take an action against him for assault," said the woman.

"Oh, no," he answered, with a sneer, "that wouldn't suit my purpose. I'll pay him out in another way. He has not got Bride Killeen yet. Not that I'd marry the conceited minx," he continued, with a bitter laugh; "no, not if she had twice five hundred pounds in the bank of Knockbeg; now, mother, I'm off."

"Wait a moment. Let me tie this comforter round your neck. Don't stay out long, Pat, or you will catch your death of cold."

When her son had been gone a few minutes, Kate Mahon took a letter out of her pocket and read it twice over. The contents were as follows :

“ MRS. MAHON,

“ If I find you allow my parishioners to hold meetings in your house, I will have your licence withdrawn.

“ JOHN KENNEDY.”

“ What can the priest mean by meetings ? ” thought the woman to herself, puzzled. “ Oh ! if I only had money,” she said, half aloud. “ I wouldn’t care a pin for any of them. It is only because the proud priest knows I am dependent on his patronage for my daily bread, that he dare write me such a letter.”

Suddenly, with that magnetic intuition which makes us feel the presence of another, even without seeing, Kate Mahon knew there was some one behind her. Turning sharply, she saw an old beggarman standing at the parlour threshold. The rain-drops dripped heavily from the snuffy-brown tatters, patched here and there with the faded red of a soldier’s jacket, which formed his outer garment ; dripped from the

battered, low-crowned hat, pressed so closely on his head; dripped from the shaggy ends of his long grizzled beard. This miserable object bent wearily on a stick. His face was lined and cadaverous, and the only evidence of life about him was the quick, undimmed gleam which shot forth from between his thickly-puckered eyelids. The woman was both surprised and perplexed at the sight of this apparition which had so unexpectedly intruded into her house at such a late hour, and without even knocking. She looked at him an instant, and then out to the shop beyond.

"I have fastened the door. We are alone," he said quietly.

She made no remark, but gazed full at him with her sharp, steadfast eyes.

Fear was a sensation unknown to her, but for a moment she lost her usual self-possession. By remaining silent she would force this intruder to speak, force him to account for his appearance, before he could divine by her manner what sort of a reception he was likely to meet with at her hands.

The man watched her with a cat-like intensity. He waited to see if he could succeed

in wearing out her patience, so as to compel her to demand what brought him there.

For awhile they continued to gaze silently at each other, and the woman seemed as if she were trying to repress even the sound of her breathing.

The clock ticked to and fro, the glowing peat fire commenced gradually to turn to white ashes, the unsnuffed candle gave smoky evidence of being neglected, and the sanded floor where the beggarman stood had become dark and muddy from the continuous dripping of his wet garments.

Outside, the storm had grown fiercer, and the noise of the thunder shook the window-sashes of the village inn.

Still this pair regarded each other, neither being willing to give in first.

At length the man's eyes twinkled; he raised his hand mechanically to his beard, but, checking himself, he let it drop again on the stick, and then began to speak, as if merely taking up the thread of an interrupted conversation:

"You wish for money," he said in a musical voice; "money is but a chimera, a phantom, a sound. Why place such a value on it, when you

possess what all the money of the world were useless either to take from or give you, intelligence? Better be a beggar with brains than a millionaire without. I am a beggar as you may see, I am penniless, yet any moment I choose I can turn moneyed men into my bankers by merely setting my brains to work. I can, for *I have done so often*, but my mission does not lie in that groove." Here he paused and looked at Kate Mahon, as if expecting a remark of some kind, but she was still in the same spot, staring stolidly at him.

"There are many worships which a man may set up for himself," he continued, "besides that of money. For instance, there is——"

"Stop, stop!" cried the woman impatiently. "Who are you, and what do you want here?"

"What need to ask what I require?" he replied; "my appearance ought to be sufficient indication of my wants."

She laughed a short dry laugh, as if to imply how useless it was to attempt to impose on her by such a flimsy disguise.

"Your voice, my friend," said she with a curl of the lip, "sounds somewhat fresher than is usual at your time of life."

The man shrugged his shoulders with an air of indolent indifference.

“Never mind my voice. I want a shelter for the night ; for, perhaps, several nights. Can you accommodate me ? If not tell me so, and I will go elsewhere.”

Feeling an irrepressible curiosity steal over her with respect to the antecedents and present intention of her strange visitor, Kate Mahon determined not to let him go without eliciting further information from him.

“I wouldn’t turn a dog from my door on such a night as this,” she hastened to reply. “Come in and dry yourself, and when my son returns he will show you where you can sleep for the night, and welcome.”

While in the act of speaking she approached the fireplace, and busied herself in building up some fresh turf around the burnt embers. Then kneeling down, she lightly blew the ashes, and holding the corners of her apron in her hands briskly fanned the fire until it flamed brightly. Rising to her feet again, she saw the man still in the same attitude at the door.

“Come to the fire,” she said, in a quick tone of voice. “Where is the use of standing there ? You will spoil the paint,” she added, as a spark of

her Palatine carefulness woke in her at the sight of his wet rags rubbing against her parlour door. He removed himself further from the door, but did not approach the fire. He fixed his eyes piercingly on the woman, hesitated, and then spoke, his voice sounding low and uncertain.

“Your son—your son. I don’t think I will wait for his return. I wish to see no one. I thank you for your kind offer, but I’m afraid it would not exactly suit me. I thought you might have some unused loft where I might throw myself for a few hours, unknown to anyone but yourself. I had better go. I am used to lying out at night. It doesn’t matter much, after all.”

“You will find no ‘stag’ in my house,” said the woman indignantly. “Nay, more,” she continued, “your hold on our hospitality will be all the stronger, if we suspect that the cause which induced you to seek it was the helping a grinding agent or a tyrant landlord to a breakfast of cold lead.”

The man’s frame shivered nervously as he heard these words. With a quick gesture of dissent, he extricated his hands from their vesture of rags and extended them towards the woman, who was surprised at their extreme whiteness and delicacy.

"Look!" said he, "believe me, or believe me not, I swear to you that they have never been stained by the blood of a fellow-creature."

He stopped and shuddered, as if the very thought of such a thing was sufficient to fill him with a horrible repugnance. A sickening sensation of disgust crept over him at the mere idea of shedding blood, not from any scruple he had as to the sacredness of human life, but simply from the self-same feeling which made him recoil from the sight of the slaughter at a butcher's shambles.

Kate Mahon laughed mockingly as she looked from the hands extended towards her to the eyes of the speaker.

"The worst murderers are those whose hands are innocent," said she. "You had better decide," she continued, "what you intend doing. My son will be back shortly. I have a loft outside where I keep old bottles; there is plenty of hay in it, and you will be safe there."

Approaching the table she took the half-burnt candle from the candlestick, and then lowering a lantern from a hook on the wall, she put the light in it.

"Come," she said, "if you want to avoid being seen, you had better hurry."

She pointed to the hall with her finger, and he went in front, giving himself up for the time being to the guidance of the woman. When they reached the back-door behind the staircase she paused a moment before undoing the bolt.

“How stupid of me!” said she. “At least, if you can’t wait to dry your clothes, a glass of spirits will help to warm you.”

“Thank you, I never take spirits.”

The woman wondered who this man possibly could be. It was such an unusual thing to refuse spirits. What could be his motive? Was he afraid it would loosen his tongue too much? Why was he disguised?

Smiling at the keen scrutiny with which she stared at him, he spoke:

“I am neither thief, murderer, nor detective. I come from my friend Clarke, who said you were to be trusted.”

Instantly Kate Mahon remembered how when Clarke visited her in the summer he said the “master” might care to make her acquaintance some day. But what a strange guise to come in!

“You are the ‘master,’” she said in a deferential voice. “Forgive me if I have appeared rude or suspicious. What necessity for a disguise?”

"There is a warrant out against me. True, it is an old one; but I can't risk being taken. Not that any prison in Ireland could hold me more than forty-eight hours, but the mere fact of my arrest would call attention to me, and that would be the utter collapse of our present movement."

"How?" asked the woman.

"You will know later on. Now, show me the loft."

"Follow me," she said, as, opening the door, she flung the skirt of her dress over her head, and went out into the yard.

The rain and wind beat round them, inflating her garments, and almost taking her off her feet. The feeble light in the lantern waned and glimmered at every fresh gust, and seemed as if it would scarcely last them to reach the stable, a few paces in front of them.

"Come in," said she, as, turning, she raised the lantern higher for the benefit of her companion.

He was in the act of obeying her when, as he put his foot within the door, he heard a strange noise, which made him draw back with a sudden start.

"What!" exclaimed Kate Mahon, with a

contemptuous flash of her gray eyes. "You are not a——"

Before uttering the obnoxious word she remembered herself, and stopped.

Accustomed to lord it over her son, the habit had grown so on her that involuntarily she was about to adopt the same tone with this man.

"It is only the old horse," she continued quietly. "He recognised my voice, and stirred himself up."

Reassured, he entered the stable. There were several stalls in it, one alone of which was occupied.

"He was my father's," said the woman, with a touch of tenderness, as she pointed to the old horse.

The man did not seem to appreciate the domestic sentimentality which prompted her to hamper herself with a useless animal for the sake of a memory.

A ladder in an angle led to a hole in the ceiling. The woman mounted and beckoned to him to follow. When they got through they were in a low-roofed room, without either a skylight or a window. In one corner was a bundle of hay, in another a heap of apples; ranged

along the wall were rows of bottles. A damp, musty odour exuded from the whole place.

"I am loth to offer you such a shelter. Better come down and remain in the house. This is no fit place for you."

"It is just what I am in search of," said he. "No fit place for me," he repeated, smiling and stroking his beard. "I have passed many nights as wild as this without a shelter. And yet——" His hand still lingering in his beard, he paused, shrugged his shoulders, but did not finish the sentence.

"At any rate you will be safer here than in the house," said Kate. "My son need know nothing of you. Not that he dare stag,"* she added fiercely. "When you are here you can draw up the ladder and fasten the trap-door, and I will take care that no one will molest you."

"I am most grateful," said he.

"You needn't be," she answered. "I would do ten times more for any friend of Mr. Clarke's. Now I will go see about something for you to eat."

"I have eaten on my way here," he answered. "I won't trouble you any more at present. You can bring me some bread and porter in the

* "Stag": turn informer.

morning. Now, give me a key for the front-door, I must go out for a few hours."

"Out to-night!" she exclaimed, with astonishment.

"Have I not told you that I was here on *business*?" he said, coldly and significantly. "Night or day is the same to me."

"Is there any hope?" asked the woman, her face lighting up with the fire of enthusiasm.

"Every hope," the man answered, calmly and confidently. "Every hope for the success of any project started with brains and prudence."

"Sir," said Kate Mahon, in an earnest tone, "I am only a woman, but I might be of some use to you. I would do anything or sacrifice myself in any way for the cause."

"Even in the matter of money?"

"Even in the matter of life," she answered.

"We may probably want a place to store arms and ammunition in. If I am to believe Clarke, you will prove faithful under all circumstances."

"Try me."

"I will think it over."

They descended the ladder and recrossed the yard. No one had come to the house during their absence.

"It is near midnight," said he, "and I am

waited for. On my way I must call at a friend's and change this masquerading garb."

"Sir," said the woman, as she handed him a key, "when you disguise yourself again wear spectacles; I could always recognise you by the expression of your eyes. And don't show your hands."

Nodding his head the man went out and hurried along the road towards Kyleneamanna.

"How late Pat is!" said Kate Mahon to herself, as she returned to the parlour. "I hope he won't catch cold."

Then taking Father John Kennedy's letter from her pocket once more, she re-read it carefully.

"Father John must know something of what is going on," she thought, "or he wouldn't allude to 'meetings.' How odd that he is against the cause! He was so different in former times. Age takes the spirit out of some people, I suppose, but not out of all, thank God! Who is the 'master,' I wonder? If he were not in earnest he would not face the road this wild night. He is a gentleman by his voice and hands, and he has brains, too, I'm sure."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUT IN THE GORGE.

THE schoolmaster and his mother's strange visitor were not the only persons who were out in the valley on this stormy night.

Bride Killeen, impelled by a desire to save Gerald Moore from some mysterious danger, had ventured forth also.

The morning after the party at Baltore, Sall-o'-the-Wig returned to Father John Kennedy's, and Bride remained with Mrs. Fogarty, helping to arrange and set the house to rights.

Though busy enough, the young girl's heart and thoughts were elsewhere. Steadily she went through her self-imposed task, but her brain was haunted by the remembrance of the malignant expression on Pat Mahon's face as he muttered the words: "Midnight—Kylenamanna—I'll be even with the villain!"

During the summer months Bride's pride had been very much wounded by Gerald Moore's neglect of her, and although since then the Rector's nephew had made several attempts to regain his former position in her favour, she had invariably repulsed him. However, now that he had so passionately resented an insult offered to her name, her heart melted towards him once more, and she grew alarmed lest the school-master's threatening words might really mean harm. As the day wore on her uneasiness increased to such a degree that, at length, she resolved to steal forth when all were in bed and search at Kylenamanna for a clue to Pat Mahon's mysterious menace.

It was on the stroke of midnight and the dwellers of Baltore were all buried in profound sleep, when Bride Killeen, throwing a shawl over her head, stole gently out through the front door, and ran rapidly in the direction of the "wood of honey." The night was sullen and stormy, the rain beat against her in torrents of sleety sharpness, the forked lightning flashed fitfully, and the wind blew in angry gusts.

When she had reached the base of the hill, she paused a moment to consider. She had not met a single creature on her way hither, and

now what should she do next? Mount to the top? There were two approaches to the summit of Kyleneamanna; one from the side of the valley nearest the chapel-house—an intricate winding path through the wood, the secret of which was known to very few of the inhabitants of Lusmore; the other the ordinary pathway from Baltore. Bride decided on taking the latter, as being the easier and more accessible. She was determined to go on—on until she should find something or somebody. Nothing daunted by the violence of the elements, she wrapped her shawl closer around her head and shoulders, and toiled fearlessly up the steep hillside, depending for guidance partly on her thorough knowledge of her surroundings, and partly on the frequently-recurring flashes of lightning which illumined her way. When she had gained almost the summit of the hill, she was surprised to hear the muffled sound of cheering coming from the direction of a narrow gorge to her right. She stood an instant to think. She knew there was a deserted hut at the bottom of the gorge, and thence perhaps the sound had travelled upwards. But what could possibly bring people to such a place in the middle of the night? Again muffled cheers were borne to her

on the wind-eddies. With a sudden impulse she scrambled down into the gorge and stealthily approached the hut. The door was shut, but through a small square opening, originally intended for a window, a light streamed. Cautiously stepping to the side of the wall nearest this opening, Bride peeped in. Startled by what she saw, she drew nervously back and rubbed her eyes as if to dispel a vision. Recovering soon, she advanced again and looked at the strange sight which presented itself inside the hut. A number of men sat at either side of a long deal table in various attitudes of attention and suspense. Two coarse tallow candles flared at the upper end, but in spite of the semi-obscurity which hung round the greater part of the place, the girl could easily discern that with few exceptions those gathered thus together were inhabitants of the valley. Several maps and plans were spread out in the immediate vicinity of the light, and, to her amazement, she saw the fair-bearded Mr. James, who had been a visitor at her Uncle John's during the harvest, now seated at the table bending closely over a paper. Behind him, and leaning over his shoulder, was his companion, Mr. Clarke, and, at his side, there sat a man whose thin jaws and

high cheek-bones plainly marked him out as one of the type generally classed as American. Gerald Moore was standing in front, his arms folded across his breast, his head thrown back. He had evidently just finished speaking, and it was in response to his address that the men had cheered.

“Brother R.,” said Mr. James (otherwise Hinson), as, raising his head from the perusal of the paper before him, he addressed the Rector’s nephew, “your report is very creditable. You have done well, considering the few months you have belonged to our organisation; you have enrolled over a thousand men; you have had them properly drilled, and a good proportion of them supplied with arms and ammunition. I expected all this, and more, of you. Have you followed out my hint about the soldiers?”

“Yes,” said Gerald; “some of my most trusted men have, by my orders, enlisted in various regiments stationed in the country at present, and, from what I have heard from them, they have been most successful in gaining us adherents in the army.”

“’Tis well,” said Hinson. “How about the police?”

“As yet I have not attempted to make any

advances to the police ; it would be hardly safe."

"When is it to be ?" asked a voice from the end of the table.

"In the spring-time," said Hinson. "The day will be duly notified to you. On a certain date each brother will head his men, and besiege and take possession of the principal town in his district, according to the arrangements and instructions already given. By acting simultaneously, on the same day and at the same hour, in so many different parts of Ireland, we weaken considerably, if we do not paralyse, the efforts of the forces which will be employed against us."

"We could tear up the railways," said Gerald Moore, "so as to destroy the principal means of communication."

"Better light bonfires on the rails as we did during the war ? It warps them pretty considerable, and that soon I guess."

"There is something in what you say, Colonel. I will jot it down for future consideration."

Speaking, Hinson took a small pocket-book from his breast and entered a few words in it in cipher.

"Sure we all have pikes in good repair, and the pike, as everybody knows, is 'the queen of weapons,'" said Ned Delaney.

Before the approbation came, however, Hinson interposed coldly :

"No, brother, the pike is not 'the queen of weapons.' This is the era of the rifle and the spade. Our movement must be no failure. We must meet and baffle superior discipline and arms by numbers and science. If we lack artillery, the enemy must supply us. Rifles and revolvers, thanks to associates abroad, we shall have in plenty ; we know the lie of the land, we have spades, and know how to use them, and there will be men, when the hour comes, competent to teach us how and where to throw up defences that will stop their bullets."

The men gazed on Hinson with unconcealed admiration, and the American, taking back his seat, nodded approval, and exclaimed :

"That's so! we want chemists, not speech-makers. 'Twas only Jericho could be knocked off a heap with blowing of bugles. We'll give them the music of Colt and Winchester, and a few explosives they don't calculate upon. We'd be damned fools if we threw away a chance on the beggars, sonny."

The latter phrase was addressed to Gerald Moore, who smiled, while the men laughed outright, a hearty, delighted laugh.

"Colonel," resumed Hinson, "you take, as you always take, the common-sense view of revolution. My friends and brothers, I may tell you we have thought over these things and believe we have provided for every contingency. Be confident, and do not be rash. Organise prudently and continuously; talk little. When the hour comes, be assured that we can do what the enemy can do, within the compass of our means, and more than he dreams of. Affiliated to us are men who have smelt powder on the battlefield, who have studied the art of war, who can tap telegraph wires, drive railway engines, manufacture ammunition, and," he added, "even attend to the wounded. If the cause fails, it will not be the fault of the leaders."

"Why not ask Peter O'Brady to join us?" put in Ned Delaney.

Hinson mused a few moments before he answered.

"From what I have heard of the editor of *The Avenger*, he is too open-mouthed to be trusted."

"He can hold his tongue, too," interposed

Ned Delaney. "It is a well-known fact that he has kept a secret of Father John Kennedy's for the past two years. Ay, and no one has succeeded in worming the least tittle of it out of him, much as he talks."

"A secret of Father Kennedy's!" said Hinson. "But this does not concern us," he continued, with a motion of his delicate hand.

"Why wait till spring?" asked Clarke in his usual vehement tones. "Why wait any longer when we are ready now?"

"Ay, ay, ay, why wait?" was re-echoed by several voices.

On hearing this, Hinson slowly raised his eyes and let them range lazily along the faces at either side of the table. The spare-jawed stranger jerked his chair back, and, burying his hands in his trousers' pockets, stared up at Clarke with the air of one inspecting a curious specimen.

"Why wait till spring?" repeated Clarke. "Every hour of delay lays us open to treachery from within as well as without. Who——"

Before he could proceed further, he was interrupted by shouts of:

"No, no! there is no traitor amongst us!"

Some of the men in their excitement brought down their clenched fists with such force on the table that the tallow candles shook in their loose sockets, and Hinson grasped quickly at the falling papers.

Outside, Bride Killeen had become so absorbed in what was going on, that she was unconscious that her feet were embedded in the sloppy heather, and that the wind and the rain were dashing against her. Little by little she had lost all recollection of the necessity of concealing herself, and had advanced her head so far, that it was framed by the opening. As soon as the clamour around him had ceased, Clarke spoke again.

"I accuse no one; but now that we are prepared, why not let us strike the blow next month, instead of next spring?"

"Yes," said Gerald Moore, "why wait any longer?"

Hinson looked keenly at the young man for an instant.

It was a marked and sombre tableau. Nature wildly raging without, men plotting within.

The low, blackened rafters flung back the reflection of the dim, wavering light, but not with sufficient force to reveal either the features

or changing expressions of those grouped at the table. Shadow and gloom predominated so much that the greater part of the boundary walls, lost in obscurity, seemed but a continuation of space. Occasionally, as the wind blew with a gust through the window opening, the coarse tallow candles flared broadly, betraying the thoughtful concentration of Hinson's gaze, and touching his fair beard with gold, and then again the light played at intervals across the pale brow, long black hair, and glittering eyes of Clarke.

Gerald Moore alone stood out in strong relief.

Hinson again gave a keen glance at the young man, and then made a slight gesture with his hand, as if to arrest attention.

The men assembled knew by this that the "master" was about to speak, so they bent their heads forward in a listening attitude.

Hinson remained seated, for, knowing that his forte lay in argumentative reasoning, and not in spontaneous eloquence, he had tact enough to speak as if holding a conversation. Besides, this manner of acting differently from the rest invested him with a quiescent coldness, a passionless dignity of demeanour, behind which he could always safely entrench himself.

“Why wait?” he said, in his softest and mellowest tone. “You ask wherefore we wait a little, we who have waited so long. Your quick spirit chafes at the delay of a few months”—here he addressed himself to Gerald Moore—“*you*, in the first freshness of your youth, with the prospect of such a length of days before you, and we who have toiled those weary years past, slowly adding stone upon stone of this edifice, we murmur not—we have never murmured.”

“No, no,” interrupted Gerald, “I did not mean to murmur. I only advocated prompt action.”

“Be patient and wait,” said Hinson, his voice still softly modulated. “Remember that, shut up within the precincts of this valley, you can know nothing of the vastness of our organisation except so far as you may glean from the narrow field of observation which surrounds you. Learn that our operations are not confined to this fair vale of Munster, nor yet to Ireland, nor even yet to Europe, for our craftsmen are employed everywhere on the face of the globe, and the entire world is to us one universal workshop.”

When he had finished speaking, his listeners, hushed and silent, made no attempt at the usual demonstrations of applause.

Hinson, with inward satisfaction, fondled his beard, and looked straight in front of him with an expectant air, as if waiting for someone else to speak. Gerald Moore was bewildered by what he had just heard. He had slightly winced when the allusion was made to his own limited experience, but soon all thought of mere self vanished, and was succeeded by a multitude of new ideas, which crowding on him at once, gave his brain such present food for reflection, that he did not care to speak. Hinson had never spoken like this before ; what did it mean ?

Whilst Gerald was lost in cogitation, William Clarke glowed with the fire of enthusiasm, his eyes flashed, his slender frame trembled and quivered.

“Yes, we will wait,” he cried. “We will curb within us the quickness of our rash spirit, and strive to learn the hard lesson of patience, and if this preparation is yet even to last beyond the term of our lifetime, do we not possess the glorious prerogative of planting and nourishing the seeds which are to germinate into future greatness ? Oh, my country !” he rhapsodised, “love of thee is the one harmonious chord to which all the strings of my being are attuned. Thou——”

Suddenly he was interrupted by the clatter of falling stones. All rushed to their feet with a single impulse, and burst out with the cry :

“ We are betrayed ! ”

The American drew a revolver from his pocket, and Clarke flung himself in front of Hinson, offering his body as a shield against any attack which might be made on his colleague and chief.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTIC STAR.

IN her eagerness to see and hear all that was passing inside the hut, Bride Killeen leaned forward to such an extent that the loose stones and bricks which formed the framework of the lower part of the window-opening gave way beneath the pressure of her body. This occasioned the noise which startled those within, and suggested to them the presence of a spy. The young girl's first impulse was to fly; but, considering that it would be impossible to reach the foot of the hill without being overtaken, she resolved to enter and brave the worst.

Before the conspirators had recovered from the shock of their surprise, she was already in the hut, and, advancing steadily, only stopped when she had reached the head of the table.

At the sight of this unexpected apparition, Clarke gently removed himself from before Hinson and resumed his former position. The American dropped the muzzle of his revolver, with an expressive shrug of the shoulders, and Gerald Moore instinctively made a step forward, but, quickly recollecting himself, he repressed all outward agitation, and drew back completely into the shadow. When Bride saw this movement on the young man's part, her heart fluttered with a sharp terror, for now that Gerald had evidently abandoned her to her fate, she saw herself alone and defenceless in the midst of those men, whose lowering brows portended no favourable feelings towards the intruder.

Hinson sat down, and waved his hand to the rest to do the same. Bride alone was standing—standing in the attitude of an accused before her judges, and, as she noticed the hardness and severity of the majority of the countenances turned in her direction, her fear gave way to a sudden spirit of defiance.

The shawl had dropped from her shoulders to the ground, and her finely developed form showed to advantage in the close-fitting merino dress, whose ruby tint imparted a glow of colour

to the sombreness of her surroundings. The long braids of her jet black hair, unfastened by the rain, fell loosely about her; her dark blue eyes were full of a luminous brightness, and the pallor of her brow gleamed purer and whiter in contrast with the feverish tint of her cheeks. One hand leaning on the table, the other by her side, she waited the issue.

Hinson regarded her at first with an air of cold indifference; but gradually the expression on his face changed to a reluctant kind of interest. He admired fine women, and the Reverend John Kennedy's niece was the handsomest girl in Lusmore, and gave promise of becoming one of the finest girls in Munster.

"How long have you been listening?" he asked.

"Long enough to divine the purpose of your meeting," was the unflinching reply.

"What motive has been sufficiently strong to induce you to quit your home in the middle of the night and come here to watch us?"

"Curiosity, perhaps," she said with a slight hesitation, and then her face flushed as she remembered her real reason for coming.

A murmur ran round the place, and a voice hissed out the word:

“Spy !”

Gerald Moore started as if he had trodden on an adder, and flashed his eyes with a fierce challenge towards the spot whence the obnoxious word had come. Bride’s lips contracted, but her gaze never wandered from her interrogator. The latter made a gesture to silence interruption, then drawing his fingers through his beard he spoke again :

“Whatever your motive for coming here, the fact rests exactly the same. You have it in your power to betray us if we let you go from this with impunity. One of the by-laws of our association decrees the penalty of death to whomsoever discovers, either by accident or by design, the secret of our brotherhood.”

“Surely you—you would not murder me,” she said, bewildered.

“The getting rid of an individual to save thousands is no more murder than would be the killing of a tyrant to relieve a nation from oppression,” was the cold answer.

She glanced along the table at the array of conspirators. From her childhood she had known those men, and from each one gathered there she could remember having received, at some time or another, various marks of friend-

ship and affection. This one nearest her had first taught her the names of the trees and wild flowers in the valley, that other had filled her childish brain with legends of the surrounding hills, but now how stern and unbending they all appeared. On one face alone, amongst them, could she trace an expression of sympathy; it was on that of Ned Delaney of the Mount. She fixed her eyes appealingly on him. After a moment's hesitation, the sturdy farmer rose, and approaching the head of the table, said:

"Why not make Miss Killeen one of us? Let her take the oath."

"We want no woman in our association," said Hinson.

"But this is an exceptional case," interposed Clarke, hastily and eagerly, from behind his colleague. "Father John Kennedy's niece would no more betray us than Father John himself."

Whilst speaking, he reached over and pushed a small copy of the New Testament close to Hinson's elbow. The latter placed his hand on the book, and regarded the young girl with a look of scrutiny. Presently he addressed her, his voice sounding strangely musical after the momentary silence.

"You see how, having such a high opinion

of your uncle, we are disposed to be more than lenient to you. It is an unheard-of privilege for a weak woman to be admitted to the secret councils of an association whose members are men devoted to great deeds and desperate projects; but Father John Kennedy's name ever bears a charm to protect those who are near and dear to him."

Turning his gaze towards the background, he said:

"Brother R., administer the oath." Then selecting a roll of parchment from the mass of papers in front of him, he waited.

Gerald Moore came slowly out of the shadow into the light, and, as he reached the middle of the hut, he stood still, and drawing himself to his full height, he said in tones of command:

"Four men to the right, fall out."

At this call the four conspirators at the extreme end of the table rose, and detached themselves from the main body.

"Attention!"

When the young man had given this order, he beckoned to Ned Delaney, to whom he said a few words, inaudible to those around.

The farmer nodded his head in assent, and called out:

“Right about face—quick march!” and the five men went into the night. As soon as they had disappeared, Gerald advanced, and took up his position near the head of the table, opposite Bride Killeen, with Hinson to his right, and the others facing him.

The young man was very pale as his dark eyes rested an instant on the girl, and when he spoke, his rich voice seemed doubly earnest and manly to her, in contrast with the melodious softness of that of the “master.”

“Brothers, show the star!” said he.

Then he drew his coat aside, and revealed underneath a green silk scarf, which crossed his breast from the left shoulder to the right hip. In the middle of this scarf, close to the region of the heart, there shone a large star of glittering steel.

Simultaneously with this movement of Moore, the remainder of the conspirators rose and flung open their coats, and Bride saw that they all wore similar scarves and stars. Hinson, who retained his seat, was the exception, for his scarf was of black velvet and his star of diamonds.

“Brothers,” said the young man, “tell our neophyte what is the mission of the Mystic Star.”

“Our mission is the overthrow of tyrants of the nation and oppressors of the poor,” said they.

“Brothers, we have all sworn the sacred oath.”

“We have all sworn.”

“Then she must swear also.”

“She must swear also,” they re-echoed.

The young man again rested his dark eyes an instant on the girl, but she was so interested in what was going on, that she made no gesture of either assent or dissent to what was said.

After a short pause, Gerald took up the roll of parchment lying on the table, and unfolded it. At the top of this parchment, above the writing, was an illuminated scroll, with an emblazoned star; near the foot at the right hand corner were five black seals, and to the left of the seals there was the emblem of a dagger piercing a heart, with the monogram, “V.T.T.,” the initials of the motto, “*Væ Traditoribus et Tyrannis*”—“Woe to traitors and tyrants.” ’Mid a profound silence he read in an impressive manner the following oath:

“I swear, by all I hold sacred in life and reverence in death, to be faithful to the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star.

"I swear, wherever or whenever the interests of this association are at stake, I will forego all ties of friendship, of kindred, of love, to accomplish the behests of those put in authority over me.

"I swear to be ready, at any hour of the day or night, to abandon my home, and even my country, and to do whatsoever task may be allotted to me by decree of the Central Committee.

"I swear never to reveal aught that I may see, hear, or conjecture with respect to the secret projects of the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star; and if I break this oath, or the slightest portion of it, I am willing to accept the punishment of death, the due meed of all traitors."

When Gerald Moore ceased to read, the conspirators inclined their heads towards the young girl, and, pointing with the index fingers of their right hands to the steel stars on their breasts, they said in the same breath :

"We have sworn. Swear also you."

"Swear," said Gerald, and his hand trembled as he offered her the copy of the Testament.

"I will not take the oath," was Bride's firm and unexpected reply.

This daring answer put the climax to the

rising indignation of the American, who, from the commencement, had been irritated by the calm reception the girl had met with.

"Swear on the spot!" he cried, with an angry oath. "We'll stand none of this humbug!"

"Swear!" came from every side.

"Will you not consider?" said Hinson, his voice full of suave entreaty, as he extended his delicate white hand, with a significant gesture, towards the line of angry faces along the table. "You are in the midst of desperate men, who run too great a risk to allow your leaving here without giving us some hostage that you will keep our secret. Father John Kennedy's name has been a talisman to protect you to the present moment; but I cannot promise that it will avail you much longer if you refuse to take the oath."

"Where's the use of shilly-shallying?" cried a bullet-headed, beetle-browed man, from the farthest end of the table. "We are not going to endanger our cause and our lives for a sentimental scruple. Better get rid of the girl and stop her tongue for ever."

Bride recoiled, with a nervous shudder, at this brutal proposition. Her lips visibly whitened,

as the thought of her Uncle John passed through her mind. What would he think had become of her ?

And then to die so young ! To be murdered on the lone hill-side at midnight, away from all those who loved her. Had none of these men hearts ? And Gerald Moore, would he stand coldly by and see her done to death ?

“Swear !” cried the American again, with an impetuous exclamation.

In spite of the young girl’s terror, she possessed much of the indomitable spirit of her uncle, and now she looked steadfastly into the menacing eye bent on her, and said firmly :

“I will bind myself by no oath.”

Provoked at her obstinacy, he approached the muzzle of his revolver close to her head and hissed :

“Then die !”

Quick as lightning Gerald Moore sprang forward and flung up the pistol, which went off with a sudden report. Putting his arm round Bride’s waist, the young man glared defiantly all round.

The American coolly stooped and picked up the pistol which had been knocked out of his hand ; and, resuming his seat, he carelessly

opened wide his long, thin legs, and softly whistled a tune.

"Brother R.," said Hinson, "retire to your place."

Gerald's only answer was to clasp the girl closer to him.

"Brother R., retire to your place," repeated Hinson more peremptorily. "Leave this matter to us."

Bride drew herself gently away from the young man's grasp, but he remained standing near her.

"Am I or am I not Head of this district?" he asked.

"Certainly you are," said Hinson, with an air of surprise.

"Then I, and I alone, have authority to act in all matters concerning this district?"

"Certainly."

Gerald Moore looked down the table. For several months he had exercised control over these men, had brought them into a state of strict obedience to his will, and now the air of command which had been laid by temporarily, in presence of his superior officers, came back to him, investing him with a calm dignity.

"Brothers of the Mystic Star," said he, "we

are banded here for a manlier purpose than that of staining our hands with the blood of a defenceless woman. Have you confidence in me?"

"Yes, yes," was the unanimous answer.

"Brothers, I also have sworn the oath of the Mystic Star, and on my head be the penalty of death should Father John Kennedy's niece betray us."

There was a moment's silence, succeeded by a whispered consultation, and then one man spoke for the rest:

"We are content that you should act for us as you think best."

Hinson sneered faintly.

Leaning forward, he drew his fingers through his beard, and addressed the conspirators:

"My friends, now that this matter has been finally settled, there is nothing we particularly wish to discuss at present; so we will no longer detain you from your homes. Before we part, let me impress upon you the necessity of being cautious, steady, and, above all, *secret*. We wait a spell, 'tis true; but let us not wait with folded arms, dreaming of luck, which never comes without a hard struggle. We are men. Well, then, let us prove by our work that we are men with a

stern purpose, and not romantic visionaries like our brethren who have gone before us. Our next meeting will take place here on the 10th of January, at midnight. I would suggest to Brother R. the advisability of setting more scouts at the base of the hill to prevent any further such surprises as we have had to-night. It is a very serious oversight on his part to thus heedlessly expose us to accidental betrayal from without."

As he finished speaking, he rose from his chair, and buttoned his coat across his breast, hiding the velvet scarf with the diamond star.

Gerald Moore attempted to say something, but Hinson stopped him hurriedly, and whispered :

"Hush, we will get rid of the men first. You can return in a couple of hours. We have many things to arrange with you before morning dawns."

Gerald, disappointed in his attempt to explain his apparent negligence with regard to scouts, now turned to the young girl and said to her :

"Come ! I will see you home."

Bride let the young man lead her passively away, but as soon as they reached the door she raised her eyes and gave a parting glance at the scene within.

Already the men, dispersed in knots, were conversing together in different parts of the hut preparatory to departure.

The American was making some comment to Clarke, whose regard was fixed on the retreating forms of the two young people. Hinson was carefully collecting the papers which lay loose on the table, and the dying snuffs of tallow candles, as they leaped spasmodically out of their greasy sockets, flung weird effects of light and shade over his face and beard.

All seemed so fantastic, so unreal, that the young girl would have believed herself the dupe of some nightmare, were it not for the pressure of a hand which grasped her own, and the sound of a voice which said :

“Come, Bride, come !”

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE STORM.

“WOULD you like to return by the secret pass?” asked Gerald of Bride as they emerged from the narrow gorge on to the open hill-side.

“How do you know about the secret pass?” she exclaimed in great surprise. “I thought only Uncle John and a few others knew it.”

“The ‘master’ found it out by chance in one of his rambles,” he replied.

“I am staying for a couple of days with Mrs. Fogarty, of Baltore, so, of course, the pass would be entirely out of my way,” she remarked.

The storm burst forth with redoubled fury. The wind blew in fiercer gusts, the rumbling thunder made the ground beneath them tremble, one vivid flash of lightning enveloped them in its fiery folds and almost blinded their eyes. It

was with great difficulty they could keep on their feet, for the wet gorse and clodded earth caused them to slip and stumble at almost every step.

Bride drew her damp shawl closer round her, and struggled bravely against the beating wind and rain. Gerald would fain have helped her if he dared. Presently there was a lull in the storm and they both stood to take breath.

"It was just like a page out of an old romance of the middle ages—wasn't it?" suddenly asked the young girl.

"What!" he exclaimed, bewildered, for while her thoughts ran on the scene she had just witnessed in the old hut, his mind was solely occupied with her, and with the fact that this was the first time he had been alone with her since the early summer.

"Does the Rector know?"

"Know what?"

"About the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star?"

"No," he answered, "my uncle is one of the old-fashioned school, and believes that whatever exists must be right. If he knew of our association he would think it his duty to go to the nearest magistrate and give information against us."

"And Uncle John, does he know?"

"I believe so; I am not sure."

"If he doesn't know he'll soon find out," she said, in a tone of conviction. "There is no one in the whole world half so clever as Uncle John."

"His cleverness hasn't availed him much," he said jealously. "I'd rather die a common soldier on the field of battle, than rust out as he is doing in this obscure valley."

Vexed at these words, she quickened her footsteps. Gerald put out his hand to stay her, and he felt her shawl was soaked with rain.

"You are wet through," said he anxiously. "My top-coat is dry; it will keep you warm."

"No, no. Indeed, I don't want it."•

His answer was to take off her wet shawl and wrap his heavy frieze coat around her. While his arm was still across her shoulder, he said:

"You will get down the hill much easier and safer if you allow me to support you."

"I came up very well without help," she said stiffly, as she drew away from his encircling arm. She had not forgiven him yet about Emily Neville.

The storm burst out anew as they went down the hill side by side.

He walked silently by her for some minutes. He was determined to tell her how much he loved her, but he didn't know how to begin. It would have been so much easier for him if she had let him keep his arm around her, for then he could have whispered a few tender words to her while he protected her from the storm.

A group of the conspirators passing them by recognised them, and making some trivial remark passed on their way.

Bride stumbled along blindly, now knocking her foot against a stone, and again battling with the strong gusts of wind and rain which almost took her breath away. She was piqued at Gerald's silence, and was inconsistent enough to be annoyed at his not proffering her his aid any more. She longed to be friends with him like as in the summer, and she was fain that he should make advances towards a recognition. A brilliant flash of lightning lit up all around, and the girl, startled, gave a slight scream. Gerald caught her hand quickly and pressed it to reassure her.

"Were you afraid, Bride?"

"A little. It was so sudden. It dazzled me."

Still pressing her hand, he said :

"Bride."

"Yes, Gerald."

"Tell me why am I so happy when near you?"

"Happier than when with Emily Neville?" she asked in a tone of assumed indifference.

"A thousand times! Do you think I could really care for that dressed-up doll?"

"Oh!" This with a prolonged intonation.

"I could have killed that fellow, Mahon, last night at Mrs. Fogarty's for daring to make use of your name with his foul lips," said he.

"Oh!"

The repetition of the interjection took Gerald aback. The exciting events of the last few hours had wrought his feelings to such a high pitch of exaltation that he felt he must at any hazard disclose his passion to the young girl, must tell her how much his life was bound up in her. His heart was full of her at that moment, but she seemed so unsympathetic that the words of affection which were welling fresh and warm to his lips were stayed abruptly in their course. They made considerable progress down the side

of the hill before he ventured to address her again. However, growing desperate at the recollection of how soon they must part, he grasped her by the arm, and said impetuously :

“Bride, you must know how I love you. No, don’t turn away,” he pleaded, “don’t be so cruel. I have loved you since the first moment I saw you. Give me some hope. Do say something to me.”

“I don’t believe in the affection which fritters itself away on many objects. If a man loves me I don’t expect him to have fancies for other women. I must be all to him or nothing,” was her answer.

“For mercy’s sake,” he cried passionately, “don’t fling back my heart to me with such cold platitudes. I swear to you there is no woman born I care for but you. You must be made of stone,” he added bitterly.

“Perhaps I am,” she said, and then hurried forward. In her eagerness to get away from him her foot got entangled in a mass of shrub, and, slipping sideways, she fell on the wet gorse. He hastened to her and lifted her up.

“My foot hurts me,” she exclaimed, wincing with pain.

“Won’t you let me carry you ?”

"I am very heavy," she answered. "I can manage to walk if I lean on you. I've merely bruised myself."

Tenderly passing his arm around her, he led her along.

"Are you suffering much?"

"Scarcely at all. I will be all right presently."

As they paused to take breath, for it was a toilsome task to advance in the teeth of the storm, the young man spoke again :

"Bride, you must have guessed by what you have seen to-night, that we men are embarking on a dangerous venture in which we hazard our liberties and our lives. In after years you may be sorry if you withhold one kind word from me to-night."

"I don't know what to say," she replied, in subdued tones. His allusion to the possible uncertainty of his future touched her immediately.

"Say what your heart prompts," he said, as he drew her closer to him. "You are no frivolous coquette, to play with a man's most sacred feelings for a passing amusement. Be your own true earnest self, and tell me if you love me or not. I would give my life a thousand times over to save you from an instant's pain, and

surely there must be some return for what I feel for you."

He put his head near as she murmured a few words, but he failed to catch their meaning.

"What is it?" he said. "Do not keep me in suspense."

"I think I also loved you from the beginning, Gerald," she answered shyly.

"My darling," he cried, in a tone of passionate emotion, "you have made me so happy. I wouldn't change places this moment with the greatest man in the entire universe."

"It does not take much to make you happy," was her gentle reply.

"Dearest," said he, after a pause, "how I wish that we had lived in the olden times. Then men did brave deeds in honour of the women they loved. Now everything is tame and commonplace. I can't even express in words the tithe of what I feel for you. If I only had the gift of a winning tongue, like the 'master'—I mean Hinson——"

"I love you much better as you are, Gerald," she interrupted, very decidedly.

When they reached the stile which divided Kylenamanna from the main road, as Gerald helped Bride over, he called her his "Dark

Rosaleen." At this name the young girl trembled violently, and exclaimed, in a tone of anguish :

"For Heaven's sake, do not call me that ! Never let Uncle John hear you mention that name."

"Why not ?" he asked, in a tone of intense surprise. "The name is so appropriate to you."

"Oh, I beseech of you," she entreated, still trembling, "never, never call me Rosaleen, and, above all, never call me by it, or utter that name under any circumstance, before Uncle John."

"But why not ?"

"We have an unhappy secret," she answered very sadly. "A secret of Uncle John's, known only to Peter O'Brady, Sally Breen, and myself. I often wish the Rector knew all about it also."

"Father John evidently does not think it necessary to confide in him."

"Uncle is so proud and sensitive," she continued, "and I am always in terror lest all should be found out. There are those who hate and envy him, and they would gloat over our secret and put a horrid construction on it. How could they understand him ? How could anyone in the world know him as he really is,

except we who love him so much? Oh, Gerald, I assure you there is nothing dishonourable in our secret. There never could be dishonour in anything Uncle John is concerned in; but our secret is the saddest thing in the whole world, and the worst of it is that uncle must suffer alone—all alone; for even we, who love him so, are powerless to relieve him of his terrible cross."

"Bride," entreated the young man, as he heard the girl give a sob, "make an effort and calm yourself. Cast all painful thoughts aside for the time being. I am selfish, I want you to forget everyone now but our two selves. We belong to each other, and we must live our own lives, and not the lives of others."

"But, Gerald——"

"We are alone with God and Nature and our own hearts," he interrupted. "I love you—let this hour be mine."

As he spoke he pressed his arm closer round her, until she could feel the pulsing of his heart. He called her by all the tender, caressing names he could think of—soft, silly nothings, which soothed her and made her forget her uncle's sorrow, and only remember that she loved and was beloved.

After a while they approached the vicinity of a low hedge, which ran along one side of the road.

"Gerald," whispered the girl with a start, "do you hear the sound of heavy breathing coming from behind the hedge?"

"Impossible. Besides, how could you hear with the storm?"

"But I am sure I heard something."

"Can you stand alone a moment?" he asked.

"Yes, my foot is all right now."

Leaving her in the middle of the road, he stepped a few paces backwards, collected himself, made a short run spring over the hedge and bounded forward a few yards. As soon as he had gone, a man scrambled through the bushes in an opposite direction to that which Gerald had taken, and swiftly darted across the road. As he passed Bride, he hissed close to her ear:

"The priest's niece! Out at this hour of the night with her lover!"

She trembled as she recognised Pat Mahon's voice. What a narrow escape! What a dreadful thing if the two men had met each other! Gerald had such a hasty temper that there was no knowing what he would do in his rage.

After some minutes Gerald returned to her side.

"Bride," said he, "it was only your imagination. There was no one. I thought it might have been that sneak of a schoolmaster."

The girl shivered at these words.

"Pat Mahon is leaving the valley," said she.

"The sooner the better, for if he crosses my path much oftener I'll wring his confounded neck off."

Presently they arrived at the gate of Baltore, and Bride, resting her hand on one of the bars, said :

"Take your coat and say 'Good-night,' Gerald."

"But, dearest," he said, in dismay, "we have not been a moment together, and I have a thousand things to say to you."

"The thousand things must wait for another time," said she, with a happy laugh. "I must go in now. Why, I have been ever so much longer coming down the hill than I had been going up. Good-night, Gerald."

"Good-night already!" he cried. "But when are we to meet again?"

"I will be home at the chapel-house to-morrow afternoon," said she. "You can come there when you like."

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" he cried impa-

tiently. "To-morrow will seem like a million of years. Darling," he added, as he stooped his head over her, "if we must part thus, kiss me—kiss me once only, so that I can live till to-morrow."

The girl hesitated an instant, and then with a gesture of infinite tenderness, she flung her arms round his neck, touched his lips lightly with her own, and fled from his grasp before he could detain her.

She swung the gate lightly on its hinges, and hurried across the grass. Before entering the door a thought struck her, and she turned and said :

"Gerald !"

"Yes, dearest."

"To please me, will you return to Kylene-manna by a different route to the one which we have just come ?"

"I will promise you anything," said he passionately, as he stretched out his hands towards her, but she eluded him, and with a soft, low laugh hastened into the house and noiselessly closed the door behind her.

Intoxicated by Bride's gentle embrace, Gerald leaned over the gate and watched until he saw the shadow of the girl pass to and fro across the

blind of an upper window. In a few minutes the light was put out, and he reluctantly tore himself away to keep his appointment with Hinson at the hut of Kyleneamanna.

In the teeth of the storm, with quickened pulses and heart aflame, the young man rushed up the steep hillside.

The touch of Bride's cool, soft lips had sent a thrill of fire through his veins, and though the emblem of the mystic star was on his breast, it was no longer patriotism but love which was burning in his ardent soul.

CHAPTER VII.

SOUL AND BODY.

It was past twelve o'clock on Sunday, and the usual service in the Roman Catholic chapel of Lusmore had already come to a close, and as the congregation rose to their feet, it sounded like the plash of waves on the shore.

The priest divested himself of his tarnished cloth-of-gold vestments ; the two scarlet-robed acolytes hastily extinguished the wax-lights, and, descending the steps, took up their usual station at opposite sides.

One solitary wintry sunbeam straggling through the side window fell across the face and figure of Father John Kennedy, as, robed in his white surplice and a rusty, long, black soutane, he leaned his back against the altar, and prepared to fulfil his promise to the Rector.

The priest's wrath against Hinson and Clarke had gained in intensity by being brooded over, and it was with a burning desire for retaliation he had ascended the altar-steps a short half-hour ago; and now, as he turned round to address his flock, he was full of a stern determination to stamp out of their hearts all that had dared creep in without his sanction or knowledge.

His eagle glance flashed for an instant over the living mass that swayed and surged beneath him, but as he met the mute humility, the submissive confidence of the upturned faces, a strange rush of tenderness swept over his soul, filling him with a great love and pity for this—his simple people.

Wherefore be wroth with them for their ignorance? If instead of being lured away by a voice subtler than his, they had even become thieves and assassins, how could he blame them? How could he be so rabidly unjust as to condemn them for not knowing better?

He knew that he was their oracle, that for them he was *infallible*. He knew that their idea of God was through him, of him, and part of him. Knowing all this, instead of being proud and exalted he grew sad and humble, and, in this moment of supreme sadness and humility, a

tardy revelation came to him, showing him the dread sceptre he had borne so long in his nerveless hand, the power of life and death he exercised over his people. Twenty years he had had this power, without ever dreaming of it or seeing it in its awful responsibility until now. Twenty years of indolent pastorship, of lazy, good-natured perfunctory discharge of the work which he believed so far beneath his deserts. Twenty years ! and Nature's sun had gone round and round, diffusing light, and life, and heat all the while, and God's sun, the sun of the soul, the sun of intelligence, had stood stock-still, scorning to throw the smallest ray on the thick darkness around. Twenty years ! Was it not too late now for vain regrets after the misused, irrecoverable past ? Too late, perhaps, for any work in the present, for what time did there remain to him to unwrap one by one the swathes of ignorance and prejudice whose bands had grown tighter and tighter round the heart of his people, even while he had been idly dreaming ?

The congregation patiently waited for their pastor to speak. Seeing his lips move occasionally, they thought he was praying, and they also breathed a prayer.

A wistful sadness came into the priest's eyes.

as he watched the eager intentness of the simple faces turned towards him. He yearned to say something that would reach even unto the heart of one amongst them. 'Twas not much to crave, but yet he longed to drop even one tiny seed somewhere that, when his voice had ceased to speak for ever, might sprout slowly and surely, and produce some kind of a scanty harvest. He knew his task was all the harder, because his flock were mostly men with narrow ideas and narrower aspirations. He could not appeal to lofty instincts, for there would be no echo to respond to him. He scorned to stoop to influence them through their affections or their passions, which he could easily do if he chose, for he was a master in the art of touching that strangest of lyres, the human heart, and knew well how to draw what music he pleased from its varied chords. He felt so helpless that his courage sank within him for a moment, and he was fain to give up the attempt of seriously addressing his flock and merely utter a few ordinary phrases as a matter of form.

But then this living mass swaying beneath him, waiting on him, watching him, hungering for what was to fall from his lips, his children

who cried to him for bread, was he about to fling ashes to them instead ?

How he yearned for the gift of the Creator ! How he longed to cry, "Let there be light," and that light would be there, glowing soft and warm in the centre of every heart, until each one should become so conscious of his own individual birth-right of divinely given manhood, that he would uphold its dignity without any question of either reward or punishment, fear or favour.

"My children," said he at length, and there was such an unusual tenderness in the way which he uttered these two words that the people, moved by a single impulse, crowded closer to the altar, as young birds might crowd lovingly beneath the parent wing.

"My children," he repeated, and this time his face became irradiated with a soft brightness ; but in an instant this expression fled, and he looked so cold and hard that the people drew back humbly, as if the change was a rebuke for their forwardness in coming too near.

Bride Killeen, as she gazed down from the little side gallery, wondered what occasioned such a gray shadow to come and rest itself on her uncle's face ; and Peter O'Brady, standing near

the great door, thought there was something forced and unnatural in the expression of the priest's eye. The remainder of the congregation were merely conscious of a more than ordinary sternness in their proud pastor's demeanour, and they trembled in nameless dread of what was to come next. The majority of the men suspected that Father John had discovered their secret organisation, and intended pouring out his wrath on them now. Under this impression, some of them edged towards the side door, anxious to escape from his notice, and believing that once away from his sight he would no longer remember that they ought to be there; others girded themselves up with a stubborn determination, and resolved to stay and bear the brunt of it.

Had not the "master" given them to understand that although Father John took no active part in the movement, still he was willing to shut his eyes to its working?

And while his people quailed beforehand, in expectation of his coming anger, Father Kennedy, suddenly attacked by physical pain, had become indifferent to them and their moral necessities.

Two or three times during the morning he had felt a tingling sensation run through his veins,

but had not paid any attention to it. The effort of uttering the words, "My children," again woke this tingling sensation, but when it ceased now it was succeeded by a wild throbbing, a sharp, quick pulsing, which beat throughout every part of his body.

One moment it seemed as if his heart was in his mouth, and that he must make an effort to swallow it back; the next moment it appeared to him as if it had fled to his feet; and then again it was anywhere—everywhere except in its right place. A dim gray mist, dotted with black spots, floated before his eyes, and, little by little, his limbs showed symptoms of failing. Was this death? Had his hour come on him thus unexpectedly?

Well, he could die, but not thus.

What! fall down in the sight of all these gazers, and have the sacredness of his dying moans exposed to the commiseration of the crowd. Never! He would serve as no show for the comments of his flock; there yet remained enough life in him to get away out of this. Away—away anywhere, provided he were alone and unwatched.

Yes, to be alone, then 'twere easy to die; but to fall down thus in the midst of the common

herd would be agony unendurable—would be death a million times multiplied.

The solitary sunbeam that struggled through the dust-grimed window became obscured by a passing cloud, and gradually the chapel was filled with gloom, until those who were nearest the door looked up uneasily at the sky, and whispered to each other of coming rain, and those who were farther in grew anxious about Father John's continued silence. What could it forebode? Was it but a stillness before the outburst of the storm?

Suddenly they saw the priest raise himself to his full height, and descend the steps of the altar with a slow, measured step. The little scarlet-robed acolytes, roused from their doze, jumped up with stumbling haste and flung open the short door of the railing which divided the sanctuary from the body of the building, and the people, drawing quickly away at either side, left a lane down the middle of the aisle for their pastor to pass through. Never had the tall, inflexible form held itself so haughtily erect. Never had that proud head towered so loftily above them. Never had the stern face been more pregnant of its iron expression. As he slowly advanced, looking

neither to the right nor left, but straight before him, with a cold, abstracted gaze, his flock retreated respectfully, wondering, but not daring to question his action.

On—on he came, and at every fresh step he took the pain and the throbbing increased, until at length each pore of his body became as it were a distinct instrument of torture. What bootéd it, after all, so long as his strength lasted to get away from here? What cared he if the agony were trebled, so that he would be spared the indignity of becoming a spectacle of compassion?

On—on he came—on to the great door, then out into the chapel-yard, where the bare leafless trees hurt his aching vision and the air oppressed him with its leaden weight. Only a few yards from the chapel to the gate that led into his lawn. Only a few yards, and yet now it seemed an infinity of space to have to cross over.

He reached the gate, and was already at the other side before the crowd had ventured to leave the building.

He was at the other side, but yet within reach of their sight, and he felt that they were curiously watching him; and although his limbs were failing under him, he braced himself up with a grim resolve that were he to die in view of

them he would die on his feet—die standing. With a last effort he managed to get to the porch without abating an iota of his stern mien, or betraying the faintest token of outward weakness. As he stood vainly fumbling at the handle of the door, a hand thrust itself from behind and turned it, and a woman's form passed in before him, and someone else followed after him.

“At last,” he muttered, as he grasped at the balusters of the spiral staircase, but tottering, he fell against the lower step, and Bride Killeen, with a low cry, sprang to aid him.

“Peter,” he gasped, in the act of falling, “quick! quick! Shut the door, and keep out these gapers.” Then, turning his eyes towards the young girl, he murmured, in broken tones: “Give—me—your—hand—Bride. Let—me—feel—something—that—has—yet—life—in—it.”

Bride took his hand between both hers, and the pressure of this fresh young life seemed to revive him a little, for he tried to rise to his feet again. And Peter O’Brady, stooping down to help him, saw that the priest’s lips were stained with blood.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECTOR'S VISIT.

WHEN the news of John Kennedy's sudden attack of illness reached the Rector, he was sorely perplexed.

Adam Glover had such faith in his friend's power and influence over the people, that he had looked forward hopefully to the result of the priest's Sunday address to his parishioners; but now what should he do? He felt almost in despair at the burden of responsibility thus cast entirely upon his own shoulders. What was he to do? How counteract this mysterious something which was gradually, but surely, spreading its baleful influence over their peaceful valley? What was it? How could he find out its source? Where could he turn for help, now that John Kennedy had failed him?

Every day the Rector called at the chapel-house to inquire after the priest's health; but John Kennedy was in a very critical state, and the doctors would not allow him to see anyone except those in immediate attendance on him. Peter O'Brady nursed him during the night, and Bride Killeen and Sall-o'-the-Wig alternately tended him in the daytime. Telegrams arrived daily from every part of Ireland, and hundreds of visitors came from the neighbouring towns and cities to make inquiries about the invalid at the chapel-house.

Mrs. Fogarty was continually sending presents of jellies and other delicacies, and even proffered her services to Bride Killeen, to aid her in nursing her uncle. The young girl gratefully, but firmly, refused all such offers, invariably answering that her uncle John must be kept very quiet, and that Peter O'Brady and Sally and herself were sufficient to take care of him.

Gerald Moore roved like a restless spirit about the grounds round the chapel-house, vainly trying to catch a glimpse of Bride. She knew by instinct that her lover was outside, but she sedulously kept herself away from the windows. Putting all thought of herself and her own feel-

ings from her, she devoted herself entirely to the care of her uncle.

One afternoon when the Rector called, the editor of *The Avenger* received him with a more cheerful countenance than usual.

"Sir," said he, "Father John is out of danger. He wishes to see you. Will you walk up?"

"Thank God! Thank God!" said the Rector fervently.

"Take care of your head," said O'Brady.

The warning was necessary, for the spiral staircase was awkward mounting for those not used to its winding steps.

When they entered the sick room the priest was lying in bed, with closed eyes. He slowly opened them at the sound of the approaching footsteps.

"John—John!" said the Rector, in tones of deep emotion, as he noticed the hollow cheeks and sunken eyes.

"Adam, old friend!" said the priest, with a smile, as he put out his long, lean hand in welcome, "I thought I should know the Grand Mystery before you; but death has passed me by this time."

"John—John!" was all Adam Glover could say, as he sat down close to the bed and placed

his hand gently on that of the priest's, outside the counterpane.

"Peter, leave us together a moment," said Father John.

"Only a very few minutes," said the editor of *The Avenger*, with a shake of the head. "If you excite yourself, I won't answer for the consequences."

When they were alone the priest spoke :

"Adam," said he, "I meant to keep my promise to you about the people ; but it was not to be."

"I know, John, I know ; but don't worry. I must try what I can do by myself."

"I don't see what you can do, except let things take their course."

"God willing, that I will never do," said the Rector, as a glow lit his mild countenance, and his gentle lips took a certain firmness of outline. "My duty is to look after my flock, and I will never cease my efforts until I find out what is wrong, and strive to make it right."

"You might as well knock your head against a brick wall," said the priest, as his eyes shone feverishly and his breathing was disturbed by a short, hectic cough. "Trust me, Adam, this thing will die a natural death

without any interposition of either yours or mine."

The Rector rose in great agitation, and walked up and down the room.

"John," cried he imploringly, as he stretched his hands in appeal towards the priest, "you know, or you suspect, what this evil influence is that has come between us and our flocks. Tell me, I implore of you, give me some clue so that I may make an effort to save our poor, foolish people."

"Why should I know?" said John Kennedy bitterly, as two red spots settled on his hollow cheeks.

At this moment the door flew open, and Peter O'Brady entered, followed by Bride Killeen carrying a basin on a small tray.

"Time's up!" cried O'Brady pleasantly. But when he saw the feverish look on the priest's face he turned quickly and reproachfully to the Rector, and said: "You have been exciting him, sir."

In Adam Glover's eagerness for the welfare of his parishioners he had become momentarily oblivious of the very precarious state of his friend's health, and now he was aghast at the possible effect his words might produce.

"Forgive me, John," said he penitently, "I—I forgot that you were so weak."

"Never mind, old friend," said the priest, with a smile. "Now, good-bye, I'm tired."

"Don't close your eyes, uncle," said Bride Killeen. "You mustn't go to sleep until you drink every drop of this chicken-broth. I made it myself; neither Sally nor Jane had anything to do with it."

"Grandmother, what a tyrant you are to me since I have been ill. Wait till I am up and strong again. Come soon, Adam."

Peter O'Brady conducted the Rector down the spiral staircase and into the parlour, where Sall-o'-the-Wig was dusting and arranging some books.

"How are you, Sally?"

"Middlin', sir, middlin'," said she, as, dropping her duster, she curtsied, and then stood with arms akimbo and a broad grin on her red face. "How did ye find Father John, sir?"

"Better than I expected, Sally; but I'm afraid I have upset him by talking too much. I must not come too often."

"Athin sure, sir," said the woman, "but Father John thinks a hape av ye. He's been

botherin' us for days to sind for ye. Ain't id thrue, Misther O'Brady?"

"Quite true, Sarah," said the editor of *The Avenger*, who, glass in eye, had been gazing in mock admiration at Sally's new pinafore. "Is that the latest fashion you have got on?"

"Sure, ain't it rale purty!" said she, whirling round to show off the effect. "Id was Mrs. Fogarty, av Baltore, that giv id to me."

"Mrs. Fogarty has a fine taste for colours."

"Och, bud wait till yer goin' to Lundun, an' won't I have a gran' new shute av clothes from top to toe. Did ye hear the news, sir?" addressing the Rector.

"No, Sally, what is it?"

"Why, Misther Pether O'Brady is goin' to be a mimber."

"A what?"

"A mimber av Parleyment, to be sure! A rale live mimber av Parleyment!"

"Is this true, Mr. O'Brady?"

"Why, sir," said the editor of *The Avenger*, with a modest air, "I must admit that there is something in what Sarah says. One of the members for our county intends to resign next session, and I mean to offer myself in his place as the farmers' candidate."

"I wish you every success," said Adam Glover warmly. "You will be sure to have the support of the Catholic priests, as well as that of the farmers."

"I expect also the interest of most of the landlords in the neighbourhood of Knockbeg."

"Av course," cried Sall, "an' iv ye don't ye can do widout 'em, me darlint. Sure, ain't ye the pet av the priests, an' that's betther than all the landlords. An' is there ivir a christenin', a wake, or a weddin' anywhere that ye aren't the very first wan to be axed to id?"

"Gently, Sarah, my princess, gently," said the editor of *The Avenger*, as Sally, in her vehemence, brought down her fist with such force on the table as to cause imminent danger to Father John's large moderator lamp, which she was about to light. "Can I offer you any refreshment, sir?"

"No, thank you, Mr. O'Brady," said the Rector. "I must be going now."

"If you don't mind, I will walk with you as far as the village. I want to call at the post-office."

When they had gone, Sall-o'-the-Wig finished her dusting, lit the lamp, closed the shutters, and then, chuckling at her own thoughts, she

went to the front door and looked out. It was growing dusk.

"Sure, an' the days are no length at all, at all," she said to herself.

While she was going about the gravel path, someone came behind her from the direction of the chapel-yard, and laying a hand on her shoulder, said, in a low tone :

"Sally !"

She turned sharply round and saw the Rector's nephew.

"Now, thin, Misther Gerald Moore, what do ye mane be staling round here like a skulkin' thief at all hours av the day an' night? Id ain't daycent, I tell ye."

"Hush, Sally, not so loud. Can't I see Miss Killeen for two minutes? I have something very particular to say to her."

"Thin, wanst for all, ye can't see her," she said, very sturdily, as she stretched her hands across the doorway, as if to bar his entrance.

"Just for two little minutes, Sally," he said entreatingly.

"No, nor for the laste bit av wan minit."

"You can't refuse, at least, to give her this letter from me?" he asked, taking a three-cornered note out of his pocket.

"Look here, Misther Gerald Moore," said she. "I ain't a-goin' to demane meself by bein' a go-between; there now's for ye."

The young man turned and walked away without another word.

"Sally! Sally!" called Jane from the kitchen, "do come in. I am afeerd av my life to be alone in the dark with this ould black cat."

"Light the candle, ye *omadhaun*, and thin ye won't be in the dark," was Sally's answer. "Och, millia murther," she thought, "he'll be afther postin' that letther to Miss Bride iv I don't stop him."

She ran after Gerald and overtook him before he reached the gate.

"Sure I was only jokin', Misther Gerald; giv' me the letther for Miss Bride."

"And you will give it into her own hand to-night?"

"Av coorse I will," said she, clutching the letter and darting away with her prize.

When she got back to the chapel-house she chuckled and laughed to herself. Going into the parlour, she took the three-cornered note gingerly in her fingers and spelt out the direction.

"Miss Killeen! Faix, I'm not mane enuf to

read that letther, but I'll never give it to Miss Bride," she said, tearing it into shreds. "Assure as me name is Sally Breen I'll never help her to carry on wid a black Protestant. Misther Pether O'Brady is the rale darlint, and comes av' a good ould Catholic sthock, an' iv Miss Bride marries him id'll be a lucky day for her. A mumber of Parleyment, too! Why, a mumber av Parleyment's wife is a'most as good as the Queen, and sits in a fine coach-an'-four, an' is a great lady. Misther Gerald Moore, *inagh!*"

"Sally! Sally!" called Jane, "there's a corpse on the candle an' a windin'-sheet."

"I'll corpse ye," said Sally, rushing to the kitchen in a rage. "Iv ye wake up Father John wid yer row I'll shake the breath out av yer ugly ould carcase."

CHAPTER IX.

BIRDIE.

THE heaped logs crackled and flamed merrily within the wide mouth of the marble fire-place of the breakfast-parlour of Castle Neville, throwing a ruddy reflection on all around. The amber curtains, looped back in heavy folds, just revealed sufficient of a perspective of leafless trees and bare lawn to make one doubly appreciate the advantage of a snug shelter.

Emily Neville, seated in a low rocking-chair, swayed herself to and fro with a fidgety, irregular movement, tapping with her foot with ill-concealed impatience against a small tapestry hassock. The breakfast-table was drawn within the circle of the heat, and Mrs. Neville was languidly toying with the daintily-patterned teacups of Sèvres china before her.

"Emily, do have a cup of tea," she said, as she laid her slender fingers on the chased handle of the silver teapot.

"Oh! aunt, I wish you wouldn't tease so," was the petulant reply; but catching the look of distress which began to spread itself over her aunt's countenance, she added, in a milder tone: "You mustn't mind my being sharp this morning, aunt, dear. 'Tis the cold that makes me so cross. Finish your breakfast, and I will wait for Richard. He will be here presently."

"You can do as you please, dear," said Mrs. Neville.

"I suppose I always *do* do as I please," said Emily, with a little laugh.

Mrs. Neville sighed softly as she proceeded with her breakfast. After a short time, however, the silence seemed to oppress her, for, consulting her watch, she again addressed her niece:

"How late Richard is this morning! I can't understand what brings him out so much on the farms lately," she continued, in a peevish, complaining tone. "He pays stewards and bailiffs enough to see to the estate, without annoying himself running about among the tenants, just like one of the common farmers. Besides, one must contract such vulgar habits when much in

contact with low people. Don't you think so, dear?"

"That depends on what you call low people," said Emily dryly, as she rocked herself to and fro with increased energy.

Mrs. Neville, irritated by the unsympathetic response, called out quickly:

"Dear me, child, I wish you wouldn't make that horrid noise; it upsets my poor head so."

"Oh, bother!" exclaimed Emily, but, checking herself immediately, she added: "I beg your pardon, aunt. I am so forgetful."

"Well, never mind," said the elder lady, in a mollified tone. "But, talking of low people——"

"Let the 'low people' wait for some other time, mother, and give me my breakfast, for I am as hungry as a hawk," interrupted a hearty voice from the back of her chair.

Mrs. Neville gave a nervous start, screamed, and then said:

"Richard, how often have I told you that you will be the death of me? You have no feeling, to come in behind me and frighten me so in the weak state of my nerves."

"Well, mother, I'm only a rough sort of fellow," said her son, as he stooped down and kissed her on the cheek.

Then, advancing to the fire-place, he said to his cousin :

"Lazy Birdie, always nestled up in the warmest corner."

Emily tossed her head, but vouchsafed no reply.

"Birdie is out of sorts this morning. Birdie won't chirp," said Richard again, as he playfully laid his cold fingers against her flushed face.

Drawing away from his touch with a shiver, Emily said snappishly :

"Do leave me alone. Not satisfied with keeping me waiting a whole hour for my breakfast, it appears as if you only came in at last for the purpose of tormenting me."

"Poor Birdie is hungry, that's what makes her so nasty. Mother, why did you let her wait ?"

Turning as he spoke, he just caught a glimpse of his mother's gray cashmere morning-robe disappearing through the door.

"I don't know what aunt can mean by running away," said Emily, with a malicious ripple of mirth, as, looking up at her cousin, she rocked herself to and fro until one of her blue morocco slippers fell off her tiny foot. "She always treats us as if we were a pair of foolish

lovers who wanted opportunities for billing and cooing. Poor simple aunt! how absurd of her to imagine that we ever could be capable of such antiquated sentimentality as to fall in love with one another."

Richard grew very red, and, abruptly quitting her side, went to the sideboard, and, taking up a knife and fork, began to hack savagely at a joint of cold meat.

A man-servant entered the room with fresh coffee and a grilled steak, his master's usual breakfast.

"You may go, Ben," said Richard to the servant. "I will wait on myself."

When the man had closed the door behind him, the owner of Castle Neville seated himself at the table, but the first few mouthfuls almost choked him, for he had no longer any relish for his food. Jumping up, he flung his napkin on the ground, and prepared to leave the room. Emily, who had been watching his movements out of the corner of her eye, now thought fit to interfere.

"Dick, Dick!" she cried, with a charming pout of her cherry lips. "Come back, Dick; Birdie wants to be fed."

He hesitated — turned and looked at the

piquant face of his cousin, which now had assumed one of the most coaxing of its arch expressions. He again approached the fire-place and stood beside her, but made no attempt to speak. Emily shook her head at him with a menacing air; then pulling a chair close to her own, she indicated it to him with her finger, and said:

“Sit down there, you naughty boy, and try not to be so sulky. But first pick up my shoe, and then you can bring me some tea and a morsel of toast.”

He willingly obeyed his imperious little cousin's commands, and soon was quite happy, seated in front of the fire, watching her as she broke bits of dry toast into her teacup. Emily sipped the beverage a minute or two in silence, then, raising her eyes, she said:

“Dick, Birdie is going to fly away.”

“You don't mean it—you are not in earnest, Emily!” said Richard in an agitated tone, as he grasped her arm.

“Take care of the cup, Dick,” exclaimed the young girl, with an affected air of fright. “Think of aunt's pet china. She would never recover the shock of the set being spoiled.”

“Hang the china!” was on Richard's lip;

but quickly gulping down the expletive, he said :

“You were joking, Emily, were you not ? It was only to plague me you talked of going away.”

“Why, Dick, how unreasonable you are !” she said, laughing lightly, as she shook her sleeve loose from his fingers. “I have been an age here. I have never remained half so long in any one place before. Six whole months ! Only consider, six months ! Don’t look so glum, you great, foolish boy, or you will make me run away this very day.”

“But you know you can’t go away from here now,” said he, in a thick, passionate tone. “It is too late now to talk like that. I won’t let you go ; you must stay—stay entirely.”

“*Must*, Dick, *must* ! You forget that no one has a right to say *must* to me.”

Flashing round on him haughtily, she encountered his frank blue eyes, full of supplication. Suppressing a smile, she turned away, and gazed down on the pile of red logs. Resting her cup lightly on her lap, she leaned her elbow on the part of the chair farthest from him, and supporting her cheek on her hand, she commenced to think. Gradually the blue-veined lids contracted, and two ugly lines obtruded

themselves between her brows. Emily was getting serious, and felt really annoyed. How stupid of Richard to be in earnest!

After a moment, he stooped forward, and, lifting the veil of hair which hid his cousin's face from him, he said :

"You are not vexed with me, Birdie, are you?"

"No, Dick, I am not vexed," was the answer, given without removing her eyes from the fire.

"You will stay, then, Birdie; stay always?"

"So, Dick, you want to clip my wings," said Emily, with her usual gay manner, as she turned her now mocking eyes on her cousin. "You want to make me prisoner for life—to shake all the fun and frolic out of me. Ah! Dick, Dick! cousin mine," she added, with a droll, melancholy shake of the head, "it would be cruel—very cruel—to rob poor Birdie of her joyous freedom and shut her up in a cage, to satisfy a mere selfish gratification. For men are selfish; ay, all, even the very best of them."

The last few words were uttered with a savage little flash of petulance. Richard looked at her with pleading eyes, and tried to grasp the hand close to him, but she drew away from his touch and waved him off.

"Birdie, don't leave me. I can't get along without you."

Emily clapped her hands on her small, pink ears, and said :

"Dick, have pity on me, and don't bore me to death with any sentimental nonsense. Do be rational. Leave love and all such silliness to milkmaids and their clumsy swains, and try to amuse me with something more agreeable, or I won't listen to another word you say."

Richard, naturally of an obstinate disposition, was all the more inclined to persevere because of her wishing to change the conversation. Placing his chair nearer to hers, he gently pulled her hands away from her ears.

"You should have thought of all this before," said he. "For the past six months you have been playing with me as if I were a great boy——"

"And what else are you but a great silly boy?" she interrupted, with a spiteful chirp.

"You led me to believe all along that you would stay, and now you talk of going away, when you know I can't do without you," here his voice grew thicker and huskier. "It was to please you I gave the site for two new schools, it was for you I gave the tenants such advan-

tageous leases. Curse them ! since I have made them independent of me, their insolence is unbearable."

"Hush ! Hush !"

"It was thinking of you," he continued, "which made me be out early and late on the estate in spite of my mother's murmurs. I tried to make myself more worthy of my bird-wife that was to be, and how can I believe that she was fooling me all the time?"

"Oh, dear ! Oh, dear !" cried Emily, with an air of distress, "what am I to do with this ridiculous boy ? It is useless to reason with him. Tell me what am I to do with you ?" she demanded, as she attempted to put on a severe expression of countenance.

"You can do what you like with me," said Richard, as, raising her hand, he rubbed it caressingly over his own face. Then, holding it still in his grasp, he looked at her, and continued :

"You can do what you like with me for good or evil. But if you go away, if you leave me, I don't care what I do one way or the other, and the fault will be yours ; for you had no right to fool me."

Emily stared at him in blank surprise, then feeling completely driven into a corner, she

glanced hopelessly round the room in search of some possible loophole of escape from her present dilemma. She never meant to fool Richard. She was only playing at love-making, and thought he was the same, and now that he was so dreadfully in earnest, what was she to do? It was just like the unreasoning selfishness of men, to threaten her with the responsibility of his future bad acts, in case she refused to be his wife. Now, if Gerald Moore had been her cousin, perhaps—Here her thoughts jumbled themselves confusedly on the top of one another, and she sighed a weary sigh, and felt inclined to run away to the farthest end of the world.

“What are you thinking of, and why did you sigh?” asked Richard abruptly.

“Did I really sigh?” she said, as she opened her eyes with a counterfeited air of amazement. “How absurd of me!” she continued, with a malicious laugh. “Why, I was only thinking of that young man with the big, dark eyes—the Rector’s nephew.”

Stung to the quick by this wanton reply, he drew himself away with such a quick movement that the cup, falling from her lap, was smashed to pieces on the hearth. Emily looked down at the fragments of china with rueful regret, then,

turning her eyes on her cousin, she saw he was staring fixedly into the fire, a sullen cloud on his face. Now, though the young girl found especial delight in teasing those about her, she could not hold out long against any symptoms of real pain. Sometimes, in her over-eagerness to administer present relief to what was, perhaps, a salutary wound, she grasped at the readiest remedy, without any thought of the after consequences.

One of these unreflecting impulses came over her, as she watched Richard Neville's gloomy countenance. Bending towards him, she laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Dick, Dick," she said, but he paid her no attention.

"Dick, you sulky boy, look at me."

But he was stubborn, and wouldn't turn from gazing at the fire.

"Make another face on you, you wicked, cross boy," she said, as insinuating her hand round his neck, she tried forcibly to pull his head towards her. "Make another face on you, and perhaps I may stay after all."

Richard yielded to the pressure of the small hand, but though his mouth twitched with a smile, his brow still retained its sullen cloud.

"Will you stay entirely and be my bird-wife?"

Will you?" he asked, raising his eyes to the sparkling face now so close to his.

"Yes, you nasty, exacting, sulky boy. Yes, Birdie will stay if you promise to leave the cage open, so that she can hop in and out when she likes. Now, wicked, make another face on you."

While speaking, she amused herself in dishevelled his hair all over his forehead and eyes. The sullenness passed from Richard's brow, and he looked exceedingly content and happy as his cousin's soft fingers playfully wandered over his head and along his face.

A step in the passage outside startled Emily, and with a little scream of alarm she cried :

"Oh, Dick! think of aunt's pet china. Hurry—hurry, we'll pick up the bits and hide them before she comes in."

Obedient to the commands of the tiny siren, Richard Neville went down on his knees, and, gathering the remains of the broken cup, dropped them into a corner of his cousin's blue robe, which she held out to him with the half-laughing, half-pouting expression of a spoiled child who didn't know whether she was going to be scolded or not.

The door slowly opened, and Adam Glover's mild countenance presented itself to their view.

"Mrs. Neville sent me to find you here," said the Rector, advancing toward the young people.

Richard jumped to his feet with an exclamation of surprise, and Emily let the bits of china fall from her robe. Then they looked at each other, and both burst out laughing like a pair of merry, light-hearted children.

"It was all Emily's fault," said Richard, "she will never hold her cup."

The Rector smiled; and then going towards the window, he beckoned to the young landlord to follow him.

"Richard," he asked in a low tone, "have you found out anything?"

"No, only that my tenants grow more insolent every day. Confound them!" was the annoyed reply.

"Hush! Hush! Do not talk like that," said Adam Glover, in a tone of gentle reproof. "Our poor people, God help them, are being led astray from their duty by someone."

"Have you been to the chapel-house lately?"

"I have just come from there, but John Kennedy's health is still in a precarious state. I dare not yet ask him to help us with his counsel. Look," he added, taking a roll of paper out of his

pocket, "I picked this up on the road near the village. It may give us some clue to what we are seeking."

"Why, this outside scrap looks official!" exclaimed Richard Neville, as he examined the contents of what the Rector handed him.

The landlord eagerly scanned the fragment of paper which had struck him as bearing an official aspect, and then he read aloud :

"We have the key. Copy the papers carefully, and send them on to——"

"What can that mean?"

"Read the other—the one with the ciphers above it," said the Rector.

Richard glanced over the remaining paper, which resembled leaves torn from a copy-book. These all contained ciphers at the top and a number of interlineations at the bottom. At length he made out the following sentence :

"There is something in the air. We must precipitate matters. I will see you on the tenth."

"The tenth. The tenth of January. Why, that is to-day," said the young landlord.

“Read on, there is more of that.”

“I suspect the traitor comes from Lusmore. Is the woman that C—— recommended to be trusted?”

“Do you notice,” observed the Rector, “how the writing on the first leaf is clear and bold, while that on the others is neat, small, and precise?”

“I have noticed it,” said Richard; “and that the writing underneath the ciphers seems decidedly familiar to me.”

At this moment a servant appeared at the door.

“Pat Mahon, the schoolmaster, wishes to see you, sir,” said he.

“All right!” said the young landlord, “send him into the smoking-room. I will come to him directly. Wait till I return, sir,” he added to the Rector.

Emily Neville, who had ensconced herself in the rocking-chair while the two men had been speaking, smiled an arch, wicked smile at Adam Glover, as soon as her cousin had left them together.

“Ah! you men—you men,” said she, shaking

her finger reproachfully at the Rector. "You think you're very clever, don't you? Plotting and planning, and believing women are poor foolish creatures, not fit to be admitted to your councils. Ha, ha, ha! little you know us."

"Emily!"

"Yes, even a silly flirt like your humble servant could tell you something about what you want to know so badly;" here she jumped off the rocking-chair, and, shaking out her skirts, tripped to the door. With the porcelain knob in her hand, she regarded the puzzled Rector with a saucy air.

"Emily, what do you know?"

She laughed merrily before answering.

"It was such fun last summer, flirting with the President of the new Irish Republic."

"The President of the new Irish Republic! Child—child, tell me what you mean!"

"Not I. I wouldn't spoil sport for the world."

Part III.—The Tragedy.

“ Woe and pain, pain and woe,
Are my lot, night and noon,
To see your bright face clouded so,
Like to the mournful moon.
But yet . . . will I rear your throne
Again in golden sheen ;
’Tis you shall reign, shall reign alone,
My Dark Rosaleen !
My own Rosaleen !
’Tis you shall have the golden throne,
’Tis you shall reign and reign alone,
My Dark Rosaleen ! ”

CHAPTER I.

MASKS AND FACES.

TOWARDS the close of the same month of January in which Emily Neville had startled Adam Glover by speaking of the President of the New Irish Republic, two men were conversing in a room in the Lower Castle-yard, Dublin. The elder, a person of grave and serious aspect, was seated in an arm-chair before a table littered with documents, most of which were secured with red tape and labelled. The younger man, perched on a high office-stool with his legs dangling down and his hat between his knees, was Pat Mahon, ex-schoolmaster of Lusmore. Judging from outward appearance, the world had gone well with Mahon since he had resigned his situation in the vale of Munster. His clothes were of the best broadcloth and of the latest cut, his

hat was glossy with newness, he wore patent leather boots with pointed toes, and bright yellow gloves with black stitchings. Across his waistcoat hung a thick gold Albert chain, with a locket and several trinkets attached to it.

The room was plainly furnished as an office. There were a couple of ordinary wooden desks with high stools to match, two or three chairs for visitors, and the table already alluded to. The walls were hung with pigeon-holed shelves containing rolls of paper, obviously for reference, as over each compartment there was a letter or figure to mark the subject of contents. The only attempts at luxury in this room were a velvet-covered couch and a large folding-screen ornamented with Japanese figures. The folding-screen hid from view a man who was lying on the couch apparently asleep.

"From the copies of the papers which we have received from you," said he who was seated at the table, addressing Pat Mahon, "and from what you have seen and heard, there is no doubt but that they intend the outbreak to take place in March. Have you found out yet the exact date?"

"The twenty-fifth—Lady Day."

"Then you had better go down again to the

country, and try to glean all the information you can. Do you want money?"

As the interrogator spoke, he gave a sharp glance at the ex-schoolmaster. The latter curled his feet together an instant, and without raising his eyes from the ground, said in a half-apologetic, half-whining tone:

"Well, you see, Mr. Greaves, I've been at a lot of expense going backwards and forwards, and finding out things, and if it was known that I 'staggered,' my life wouldn't be worth a farthing candle."

"Your mother is the postmistress of Lusmore?"

"Yes, that was how I was able to get at the papers. You would have never known about it at all only for me."

"You will be well paid for your estimable services," said Greaves quietly.

"Well, I counted on that, or I wouldn't run the risk I've done, besides giving up the schools, when I had a chance of becoming inspector."

"Is your mother aware that you are in our pay, or is she willing to help us?"

"No, I wasn't such a fool as to tell her," said Mahon, chuckling. "She thinks I am a commercial traveller."

"I will give you fifty pounds on account," said the other, as he rapidly wrote a cheque, and threw it across the table to the ex-schoolmaster.

"You won't let my real name out, Mr. Greaves?"

"Be under no apprehension. Your name is supposed to be Michael Hoolahan?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right," said Mr. Greaves, rising as if to put an end to the conference. "Get all the information you can. You need not be too economical in the way of spending. Ah, by-the-bye," he added, as a thought struck him, "find out positively if Hinson is the head of the movement, or if someone else may not be in the background."

At the mention of the word "Hinson," the man on the couch behind the screen raised his head abruptly and listened, his handsome, olive-hued face alive with interest.

"I am sure Mr. Hinson is the real leader, sir," said the schoolmaster; "I know he has set everything going."

"Can you form any proximate idea of the amount of men and arms the rebels are likely to have at their disposal?"

"I can't exactly say. I have heard Mr. Hinson boast that he has armed men all over Ireland, from north to south, and from east to west, and I have seen myself on moonlight nights hundreds of men drilling on the hills round Lusmore alone."

"Ah! You may go now, Mahon; travel express. Should anything important turn up, don't telegraph, but come at once to town with the news."

"Trust me, sir," said Mahon. "I am much obliged to you for the cheque. Good-bye, Mr. Greaves."

As he finished speaking, he put out his hand with an impudent smirk of familiarity.

"Good-bye," said Greaves, ignoring the proffered hand with a cold stare.

As soon as the informer had left the room, the man on the couch sprang up, and pushing aside the screen presented himself in view.

"De Vautier!" exclaimed Greaves, in accents of consternation.

"De Vautier, at your service," said the other imperturbably, as he seated himself on the high stool just vacated by the ex-school-master.

Half-an-hour previous to the conference with

Mahon, the chief of the Secret Intelligence Department had been called away on urgent business, and in his haste forgot to lock the door of his office.

Now as he looked at the handsome, dark face in front of him, he felt thunderstruck at the possible consequence which might ensue from his momentary neglect. How careless! and there were papers of such vital importance lying about.

The Marquis De Vautier, though Irish born, was of French descent; he had gone through two fortunes already, and was fast making away with the third. He belonged to that annoying class known to busy artists by the cognomen of egg-sitters. Having no occupation, and no resources in himself, he passed his time principally in wasting the precious hours of his industrious friends. He frequently inflicted his company on Greaves, his latest victim. Finding the door of the office open, he ensconced himself snugly on the couch to wait, and thus fell asleep until he was roused by Mahon uttering Hinson's name.

"How much have you heard of our conversation?" asked the chief anxiously.

"Only the concluding sentences, I assure you."

“You will not——”

“Never fear,” interrupted De Vautier. “When necessary I can hold my tongue. What a precious villain that was !”

“We must use dirty tools for dirty work.”

“Ay, and pay them well, too. As soon as I am penniless, which I expect to be one of these days, I will seek you out and ask for an engagement.”

“As a secret agent ?” asked Greaves, with a smile.

“Why not ? I have the *entrée* of every court in Europe, I am acquainted with all their backstairs intrigues, and can speak half-a-dozen languages as well as my own. Why, my dear fellow, I would be invaluable to your office.”

“You forget that our paid agents do not work in courts, but among peasants and agitators.”

“To think of Hinson turning conspirator.”

“You know him, then ?” said the chief eagerly.

“Oh, I met him some years since in Vienna,” was the careless answer. “He was a clever fellow—very clever, and could talk you into believing that black was white ; but he was the

last person I would dream of as attempting anything foolish."

"Why not?"

"Because he was so deucedly practical. Come, old fellow, shut up shop for an hour or two, and let us go and have a snack together."

"I am sorry I did not know you were here when I brought that man in," said Greaves seriously. "I have never made such a mistake before as to leave the door unfastened during my absence."

"Never mind. Mum's the word. I am as secret as the grave. As a loyal subject of her Majesty the Queen, I'm bound to be the enemy of all rebels."

Greaves shook his head doubtfully, and when they got outside he tried the lock of the door twice to be certain that the bolt had shot home. Then, with a preoccupied air, he walked slowly on beside his companion. When they were a few yards beyond the precincts of the Castle, the Marquis said to the chief:

"Don't fear. Mum's the word."

Late the same evening, De Vautier was strolling along the most deserted part of Sackville Street, gaily humming the refrain of the

drinking song of a French *opéra bouffe*, when he jostled inadvertently against a man rather below the average height, who was walking slowly along in the same direction. The Marquis raised his hat and lightly apologised in his courteous French way, and then passed on; but he had hardly gone a few paces when the man overtook him, and said in a low tone :

“ De Vautier ! ”

“ Hinson ! ”

“ Hush ! not so loud ! We may be overheard. Follow me at a little distance.”

“ But——”

“ Hush ! not here. Follow me.”

De Vautier, whose curiosity was aroused, followed in the wake of Hinson, who led him down two or three cross streets, and in and out through many intricate lanes and alleys, until at last they reached an obscure and badly-lit part of the city entirely unknown to the Marquis. Hinson paused before a low doorway and tapped five times with his knuckles, there being a distinct interval between each tap. After the lapse of a few seconds the door opened cautiously, and, stepping within the threshold, he beckoned to De Vautier.

The latter scarcely liked trusting himself alone

in this place ; but his slight hesitation soon gave way to his love of adventure, and entering boldly, he found he was in a dark passage, at the end of which he saw a light glimmering through the chinks of a door, and heard the sound of voices.

“Wait here a moment,” said Hinson, in a whisper, and then vanished into the room beyond. Presently returning with a candle in his hand, he said : “Come in.”

De Vautier passed into a large square room, with windows high up in the wall. Four men were seated round a table, drinking. To his great surprise these men wore black masks.

“Marquis,” said Hinson, with a graceful wave of his hand, “allow me to introduce some very particular friends of mine to you. Excuse my not naming them. I may, perhaps, one day, should you join us.”

The four heads bent towards De Vautier, and he returned the salute.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “I am glad to make your acquaintance, but I would like to see your faces.”

“That cannot be,” said one of them, with a foreign accent.

“Be seated, Marquis,” said Hinson. “The

last time you and I were together, you regaled me with an Emperor's Tokay ; to-night your delicate palate must content itself with the coarser fire of Irish whisky. Will you take it hot or cold ? ”

“ Hot, please. ”

“ Mix for yourself. The water is boiling in the urn, and the spirits in that bottle to your left are of Jameson's oldest and mellowest brand. ”

De Vautier mixed his punch with much care and deliberation, Hinson the while watching him with an expression half-contemptuous, half-admiring.

“ Marquis, let me give you a toast. Here is death to all spies and traitors ! ”

“ With all my heart. Death to spies and traitors ! ”

“ Amen, ” said the four masks solemnly ; and the ludicrous effect produced by the four pair of eyes, staring out at him from behind their black velvet surroundings, tickled the Marquis's fancy so much that he burst out laughing.

“ I want you to do something for me, ” said Hinson to him.

“ How ? ”

“ You were seen this afternoon in a restaurant

with one of the officials of the Castle, and notwithstanding the efforts of your companion to make you subdue your voice, part of your conversation was overheard. I want you to repeat to us in detail the part which referred to me."

"Oh! come, come, mum's the word. I'm not the one to betray confidence."

Hinson smiled calmly and, drawing his hand slowly through his beard, he said:

"You mentioned Lusmore, Kennedy's parish, you also alluded to some informer, and you spoke of an armed outbreak in March. Am I not right?"

"Well—well, as you know so much I don't mind telling you that it is all U P with you, and the sooner you get out of Ireland the better." Saying this, the Marquis drained his glass at a draught and commenced to mix himself another. While he was thus occupied, one of the masks made a sign unobserved to Hinson.

"What was the name of the spy from Lusmore?" asked the latter.

"Eh?" asked the Marquis, lifting his head from the glass. "The spy! how should I know? But, take my advice, and leave the country as quickly as you can, and your friends also, if they are mixed up in this foolish affair."

"Never!" cried one of the men impetuously, as he leaped to his feet, and, dashing his mask on the table, disclosed the pale face and dark eyes of Clarke. "I shall never desert my unfortunate country in her hour of need! Tell me the name of the vile traitor who has betrayed us, and I will tear his black heart out of his body!"

"By Jove! what a fire-eater," muttered De Vautier. "Sir," said he, aloud; "as a gentleman, I cannot break my word, and I have promised to be silent."

Clarke, with a passionate exclamation of disappointment, sat down again and buried his face in his hands.

"After all," said Hinson quietly, "we cannot retreat now; succeed or not, we must go on. Our enterprise is too vast to sustain any but a temporary shock from the failure of our present scheme."

"You have something big on hand?" exclaimed the Marquis, whose eyes glistened, partly from curiosity and partly from the effects of the potent liquor which he had been imbibing.

At this question a sarcastic laugh broke from the lips of one of the masked men, and he drawled out in an unmistakable American accent:

"Why, mum's the word, you know."

"Come, Marquis," said Hinson, "as you will not give us the information we require, we must seek for it elsewhere. I will detain you no longer here."

"Gentlemen," said De Vautier, suddenly addressing the three remaining masks with an air of eager interest, "will you let me see your faces?"

But they shook their heads negatively.

"Some day—when you have run through your fortune," interposed Hinson, "you will join us and work with us, and then, probably, my friends may unmask to you. Now I will show you the way back to your hotel."

De Vautier rose, but the whisky was so strong that he could scarcely keep himself on his feet. Steadying himself with an effort, he made towards the door.

"By Jupiter! I'm drunk," he exclaimed.

"Only in the legs," said Hinson. "Your head is as clear as ever."

Then turning to those at the table, he said, in a significant tone :

"My friends, we meet in Paris at the old rendezvous on the twentieth of April."

At these words Clarke raised his head and looked at the speaker.

“What!” he cried passionately, “you are, then, going to abandon Ireland!”

CHAPTER II.

IN THE SPRINGTIME.

IN all the fresh gladness of a perpetually renewed youth, spring has come once more, and soft, gentle April has already begun to shed moist odours of budding flowerets and bright greenness of verdure throughout the vale of Munster.

From the outer world is borne on the wings of rumour, tidings of the failure of Hinson's deeply-concerted plot to wrest Ireland from English rule. There have been a few abortive raids on the bleak mountains, some attacks on police-barracks and martello-towers, and a few risings in small towns; but before the movement has time to reach even the outskirts of the valley it collapses, completely and utterly. Clarke and several of the active ringleaders are arrested and sent to prison.

It is now very generally known how, for months previous to the outbreak, a spy in the pay of Dublin Castle had been furnishing to the authorities the fullest details of the secret projects of the insurgents, so that the Government were prepared beforehand for what was going to happen ; but no one had any suspicion that the ex-schoolmaster of the valley and Michael Hoolahan, the Castle informer, were one and the same person.

And while Europe is ringing with his name, Hinson, hunted and footsore, is hiding from the soldiers in the fastnesses and hills of Munster.

On Sundays, within the pretty ivy-covered Protestant church of Lusmore, Adam Glover gives forth his favourite text of "Love one another," but the mellow brown eyes are now always full of a tired sadness, for he feels that the hearts of his people are still shut fast against him. These sturdy Palatine farmers are much more stubborn and tenacious than their more impulsive Catholic brethren, and sometimes the Rector wishes that he had John Kennedy's impressionable flock to deal with instead of his own ; but he puts this longing quickly from him as being weak and unworthy. Though aware now of what caused the change that puzzled him

during the past summer and winter months, still his knowledge does not seem to avail him much ; for so great was the fascination exercised over the minds of his flock by the subtle Hinson, that his defeat and subsequent flight, instead of weakening the "master's" influence over them, has strengthened it the more.

And the Rector, as he leans wearily against the dark carved-oak pulpit, turns his eyes for relief to the one spot of sunshine in this dreary waste—the sparkling face of Emily Neville.

At the chapel-house, John Kennedy's life has glided on in peaceful, uneventful quietness. Carefully has he been tended, carefully have all possible sources of excitement been warded from him. He is still too feeble to attend to his ministry, but hopes are entertained that this balmy spring will bring recuperative power to his exhausted frame, and rid him of the short, hacking cough, which seems almost to rend him. When the news of the abortive outbreak was first brought to him, his friends trembled in fear of the effect it might produce on him ; but the intelligence was merely greeted by one quick flash of the eagle eye, an abrupt laugh, and the dry comment :

"James all over. He begins by leaping at the mountain top and ends by falling into the ditch."

Then the subject was dropped, and there was a tacit understanding that he was to hear no more of it; and the next time newspapers were placed before him he pushed them gently aside, and said :

"No, no, Bride—hide them away—hide them away. Bring me some old book instead. I am sick of the actions of living men. Let me solace myself with the thoughts of men dead and gone."

As the days grew milder, he ventured out by degrees in the open air, amusing himself while rambling through his little farm by digging up the odd weeds with a spade. One soft afternoon he was thus occupied in the fields in front of his house, Bride Killeen close at hand ready to attend to his wants. Pausing from time to time, he gazed at the surrounding hills and inhaled mouthfuls of fresh air with a pleasurable sensation of renewed life and health.

"Oh, thou circumambient atmosphere!" he exclaimed, as, resting his hands on the top of his spade, he looked up at the sky, a smile of serene enjoyment on his face. His long black

soutane, gently blown by the breeze, floated loosely about his gaunt figure ; his square clerical biretta was pushed off his brow, and a wistful earnestness shone within his eyes. After a few minutes' silent contemplation, he turned to the young girl.

"Bride," said he, "if I were to begin life over again I would be a farmer. The earth would yield me the prose realities of material life, the sky nourish my spirit with its ever-varying poetry, and, both blending together, would teach me the philosophy of the double existence of man, in which mind and matter mutually poise and balance each other. And from afar off there would be wafted to me the din and uproar of cities ; and, resting on my spade as I do now, I would marvel why men struggle so fiercely for what they can have such slight hold of."

The young girl smiled and shook her head as she drew her garden-rake through the heap of weeds at her feet.

"Ah ! Bride," said Father John, leaning his arm on her shoulder, as if he needed another prop beside the spade, "I see you are rather sceptical as to the charms of a pastoral life. Youth is ever sceptical of the experience of age,

but never sceptical as to the realisation of its own hopeful visions."

"Would you have us otherwise?" she demanded, raising her frank eyes to his.

"God forbid, child," he ejaculated, looking down at the fresh young face. "Keep your visions, revel in them, believe that the world is ever fair, that men are brave, women true; believe in grand actions, pure thoughts; believe in an ambition higher and nobler than that which is to be met with daily in the street and market."

While speaking, they had been gradually approaching the bower library.

"Look how green the rose-bushes are getting," he said, resting his spade against the side of the open glass-door, and lifting the drooping branches with his hand. "We must make a luxuriant little wilderness of our bower library. We will let the grass grow high round it, so that there shall be no commonage of a pathway to our pretty retreat. And in the summer-time I will sit within, a venerable patriarch, gazing out at the far-off hills, while Gerald and you outside will train the roses all over the walls."

Bride dragged her garden-rake to and fro, a radiant colour mounting to her cheeks at the

allusion to her lover. The priest watched her a moment, and his stern, iron features waxed marvellously bright and tender ; then, looking from her to the scene around, he exclaimed :

“How fair this world of ours ! Never until to-day have I felt the gift of life with such glad exultancy. It seems as if my heart had suddenly become a mirror, wherein each tree, bud, and flower came to reflect itself in myriad forms. I am no longer one man, but all men ; no longer a child of nature, but nature’s king and master.”

Pausing, he turned with an arch sweetness to the young girl beside him, but, instead of listening, she was looking steadfastly towards the front gate.

“What is it ?” he asked.

“Do you not see ? There is a boy outside the gate beckoning to us. Shall I go and ask what is the matter ?”

“Go then,” he said, playfully pushing her from him. “Don’t stop long, as I want you to hunt up some more weeds for me.”

Bride ran across the grass to the entrance gate.

“Miss, here’s a letther for ye,” said one of the village urchins, with a grin, as he tugged his forelock deferentially, previous to handing her a scrap

of paper. "The postmisthress gev it me for ye, an' iv ye plaze, Miss Bride, yer to hurry."

The girl opened the missive, which contained the words :

"Come to me at once.

"KATE MAHON."

"Oh, Miss Bride," cried the boy, his eyes glistening with delight, "the village is all full of red-coats."

"Of what ?"

"Av sogers, miss. There's hundreds an' hundreds av thim, an' they all hev guns an' bayonets, an' some av thim have horses, an' ye niver saw sich a grand sight."

"Soldiers in Lusmore !" exclaimed the girl, greatly surprised.

"Yes, miss, rale fightin' sogers."

Bride gave the boy a penny, at which he grinned and pulled his forelock again, and then scampered back to the village to see the "red-coats."

Standing at the gate, she looked up and down the road. Presently she saw the Rector riding towards her, who, as soon as he caught sight of the young girl, alighted, and, throwing the reins

lightly over the back of his sleek chestnut mare, he approached her.

“How is Father John to-day?”

“Uncle is so well to-day. Do come in, Mr. Glover, and see him; he will be so glad. He is over there in the field by the library.”

“Not now, Bride. I shall return in half-an-hour, or thereabouts. I must go home first, and then call at the Castle on my way here afterwards.”

“You have not come through the village, have you? Did you see the soldiers?”

“No, child; I have seen no soldiers. I have been in Knockbeg all the morning.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the girl, in an animated tone, “was the jeweller able to mend the hinge of your Indian puzzle ring?”

“Yes, but after a great deal of trouble. I have it with me.”

“I wish you would let me try it on again to see if I can now get it off. You remember you showed me how last summer at your own house.”

The Rector smiled, and, putting his hand into his waistcoat pocket, he drew out a tiny box, enclosed in which was the Indian puzzle ring. Bride held out her finger, and he dropped the ring over it. With an amused air he watched

her turn and twist it about, until at length she found the right hinge, which she pressed successfully. Three distinct times she tried on the ring, and always got it off easily.

"If anyone ever steals my ring," said he, "and is foolish enough to wear it, he will never be able to get it off again without either your assistance or mine, Bride."

"He could file it off," said she as she handed it back to him.

He took the ring and put it into its tiny box, and then taking out an envelope with a thick letter inside, he placed the small box between the folds of the letter, and wrapped it up in the envelope before returning it to his pocket. While in the act of doing this, the Rector's face grew very grave and serious, and he sighed.

"Is there anything wrong?" asked the young girl with ready sympathy.

"Yes, my dear child," he answered, "everything is wrong. I have heard news this morning at Knockbeg which has made my heart very sore, and the contents of this letter in which I have just wrapped my ring has caused me great pain—yes, exceeding great pain."

"I am very sorry."

"God is good, dear child, and He will show

His servant a path out of this darkness. Good-bye, Bride, for a short time."

"You will be sure to return in half-an-hour or so?" said she.

"Yes," he said, as he went towards the mare, who, taking advantage of her temporary liberty, was cropping the soft young grass at the opposite hedge. Her master led her gently to the gate, where the girl patted the animal's silky brown mane.

Then the Rector mounted and rode away. As he turned the angle of the avenue-road leading past Castle Neville, he looked back at Bride and smiled.

"What a beautiful face he has, and how good he is!" she thought, as, closing the gate behind her, she walked leisurely along the broad gravel-path to the chapel-house. Her uncle was near the bower library, leaning on his spade. Sall-o'-the-Wig in front of him, with her arms akimbo, was lecturing him on the folly of over-exerting himself in the weak state of his health. When the young girl approached them, Sall called out:

"Miss Bride, whin are ye goin' to have yer tay? There's that *omadhaun* av a Jane gone to Knockbeg to buy a shawl, an' she is sure not to be back till dark night."

"Never mind, Sally, you can prepare the tea yourself in half-an-hour's time. Mr. Glover is coming to see uncle, so mind and lay for three."

"Ay thin, miss, av the Rector is comin' to tay, you'll be afther makin' some hot griddle-cakes for him, an' the fire is just splendid for bakin'."

"No, Sally; I am going to the village, and won't have time to make griddle-cakes. We can have the home-made bread, and some new-laid eggs and water-cress."

"Full of household cares, as usual, grandmother," remarked the priest, with a smile.

"Uncle," she said, "Kate Mahon has sent for me."

"Kate Mahon!"

"Yes; I don't know what she can want me for, but Sally will take care of you while I am away."

"Go off, then, quickly," said he. "I will remain in the library until you return."

The young girl hesitated an instant, and then said pleadingly:

"Uncle, dear, you will not go out on the road? I will be so anxious lest anything might occur to annoy or excite you."

“ You foolish grandmother, I don’t intend to let anything annoy or excite me.”

“ And directly the sun goes down you must not remain out-doors a moment longer.”

“ Ye may be easy, Miss Bride,” said Sall, “ I’ll take care av the masther meself.”

CHAPTER III.

“ YOU HARBOUR THIS MAN ? ”

JOHN KENNEDY entered his bower library, and first glancing with a kind of genial welcome at each separate case of books as if they were old friends he was greeting, he seated himself on the couch facing the open glass door.

For a minute or two he rested his arms on the table in front of him, and supporting his head with his hands, gazed on the charming scene without. The soft breeze fanned his hair and brow, and a slanting ray of sunshine touched the hollow cheek with the semblance of a healthy bloom.

The suffering of the past months had toned down much of the harshness of the stern face ; or, rather, had let gleam through the iron visor some of the beauty and sweetness that had always lain concealed behind it.

Presently Father John, rousing himself from his contemplation of nature, drew towards him the book-stand, on which he recognised with a smile his favourite, "Don Quixote." Still supporting his head between his hands, he let his eyes drop lazily on the open page.

He had scarcely read a line when it appeared to him that the light proceeding from the small window to his left had become obscured. Believing this darkness to be occasioned by a passing cloud, he took no further notice of it, and soon was entirely absorbed in the perusal of his book.

Suddenly a shadow fell across the open page, and, lifting his head, Kennedy saw James Hinson standing on the threshold of the doorway.

The priest's breath came fast and short as, slowly raising himself from his seat, he pressed the palms of his hands on the table, and, bending forward, he fixed his gaze on the intruder. The gaunt figure looked powerful enough in spite of his weak state, and the eyes, erstwhile so mystically tender, now flashed with all their former fire as they greeted the advent of this unexpected visitor.

For the space of an instant Hinson was abashed by this fierce scrutiny; but soon re-

covering his self-possession, he mechanically moved his hand towards his chin to caress his beard, forgetting that he had already sacrificed it for the purposes of disguise.

"Kennedy," said he, in his soft, languorous tones, "they told me you were ill, but I was not prepared to see such a sad change."

The table groaned and shook beneath the pressure of the form bending over it, the proud nostrils quivered, and the breathing grew quicker. At length John Kennedy laughed bitterly, and then burst out, in tones of withering scorn :

"Shallow-brained plotter! Plausible concocter of hollow shams! Arch-deluder of the unfortunate people! 'Tis true, then, that you had not even spirit enough to share the fate of those other poor fools!"

Hinson winced slightly, but a smile, calm and deprecating, spread itself over his blonde countenance.

"Kennedy," said he, with an air partly compassionate and partly reproachful, "the present weak state of your health excuses the injustice of such language. Were your intellect as clear and as acute as in former times, you would not expect me to make useless forfeiture of my liberty simply

because other men had not sufficient foresight to take care of themselves."

The priest looked at the speaker, and then his lip curled contemptuously ; but, holding his wrath in control, he said dryly :

"And the people?"

Hinson's wrinkled eyelids puckered closer together. Round the corners of his mouth hovered a sneer which he strove to repress, for those sharp eagle eyes were full on his face.

"What! Kennedy!" he said, in a tone of surprise which might have been real. "You to talk of the people! You, whose every look has been fraught with disdainful patronage for the mass—the common herd! No, you are not yourself to-day, or you would not speak thus," he continued in his most seductive voice, involuntarily raising his hand to where his blonde beard ought to be, and then letting his delicate fingers, baulked of their solace, seek refuge in twisting the brass knob of the glass door. "The sovereign people sounds very well as the pet period of frothy orators, but for you and me, Kennedy, the sovereign people——" here Hinson paused, shrugged his shoulders significantly, and cast his eyes on the ground.

There was an ominous silence for some

moments, and then the priest spoke in a strangely quiet tone :

"What purpose brings you here now?"

Startled at the calm question, Hinson raised his head and the eyes of both men met, and each seemed trying to read the innermost thought of the other.

A full-throated bird, flying from branch to branch round the bower library, poured forth a song of joy, and the balmy breeze coming through the open door was redolent with the refreshing perfume of the flowers of spring.

"What brings you here?" demanded Kennedy.

"I come for food and refuge," was the answer.

"To me! To me!"

"To you, yes. The soldiers have tracked me to this valley. At this hour probably they are beating the wood of Killavalla in search of me."

"And you come to me for shelter?" said Father John sarcastically. "What an idea you must have of my meek, forgiving spirit! Begone, sir, begone! Out of my sight this instant."

Hinson looked at the priest, paused a moment, and then turned to go; but his keen ear detecting the sound of approaching footsteps, he retreated into the farthest corner of the library, and cried :

“Lock the door, Kennedy ; there is someone coming. Lock the door or I am lost !”

The priest, stern and implacable, gazed coldly at him without making the slightest movement from his position behind the table.

“Kennedy,” entreated Hinson, “it is of vital importance that I retain my liberty for the next few days. I beg of you help me this once. Remember,” he added, “I have tasted of your salt.”

Those last few words had a visible effect on John Kennedy, for his countenance changed as they were uttered. The priest of Lusmore, had very broad views as to the sacredness of the rites of hospitality, and now he felt himself torn between two conflicting emotions. His fierce rage against this man, who had so plausibly duped him in the summer time, urged him to hurl Hinson from his door ; while, on the other hand, his having tasted of his salt made him feel bound to protect him. There was a sharp struggle within Kennedy, and Hinson, as he watched him, wondered what would be the result, and grew inwardly agitated as he heard the footsteps coming nearer and nearer.

To his intense relief, the newcomer proved to be Sall-o'-the-Wig, who, putting her red face

and ragged crop of hair in at the doorway, called out, in a scolding tone :

"Now, then, Father John, cum in, av ye plaze, sir; ye've been out too long entirely, entirely, an' ye'll be afther ketchin' yer death av cowld, an' thin won't the docther an' Misther Pether O'Brady kick up a fine hullabaloo about ye."

Here she noticed Hinson, and, opening her round eyes to their fullest extent, she dropped a curtsy to him, and, smoothing down her pink pinafore, said :

"An' how's yerself, sir? Id's some time since we see'd ye afore."

"I am all right, Sally," said he, with a smile, as it struck him that this woman might possibly help him. "Kennedy," he said, making a final appeal, "there is not a prison in Ireland could keep me forty-eight hours, but I must be in Paris the day after to-morrow, and it is a matter of life and death to me not to be arrested before then."

Father John stared coldly at him, but vouchsafed no answer. Addressing the woman, he said :

"Sally, this man seeks shelter and food from us. Do what you can for him."

Then walking straight out of the bower library, the proud priest directed his steps towards the house.

“Arrah, sir,” said Sall to Hinson, “bud ain’t ye afeared ye’ll be cotched about here?”

“The soldiers are after me,” said he. “If I could get to Delaney’s of the Mount I could remain there till dark, and then start for Dublin.”

Sall scratched her head with a perplexed air, and frowned, and bit her lips; but soon her face expanded into a grin.

“I have it, bedad,” she cried; “I’ll dhress ye up as a woman, an’ say yer me ould aunt from Lim’rick. Jane’s gown will fit ye, an’ thin wid wan av her forty-bordered nightcaps, an’ a shawl over yer head, an’ her Sunday cloak all round ye, an’ a sthick in yer fist, ye’ll desave all the peelers an’ sogers from Lim’rick to Dublin, an’ back again, or me name ain’t Sally Breen.”

“Not a bad idea,” said he, “but there is no time to lose.”

“Come along, then,” she answered. “It is rale lucky that Jane is gone to Knockbeg, for she’s an ould gossip.”

Hinson and the woman hurried as fast as they could across the lawn to the chapel-house. Taking him into the kitchen, she got some of Jane's clothes, and helped him on with them over his own. In less than ten minutes she had made a complete transformation in his appearance. Leaning against the kitchen-dresser, she burst out laughing as she watched him eat some food which she had placed before him, the frilled nightcap bobbing up and down with every mouthful.

"Ah! thin now," said she, chuckling with glee at her success, "me aunt from Lim'rick, bud yer a nate ould woman."

"It is not the first time I have been disguised as a woman," said Hinson, as he wiped his mouth after a long draught of porter.

"Bud ye've niver been me aunt afore," said she with a sly grin. "Whin Miss Bride comes back I'll go wid ye meself to Misther Delaney's, an' I'll do all the talkin', for ye're to be deaf and dumb. See iv I don't bother any soger or peeler who meets us."

"How can I thank you?"

"Oyeh, niver mind. I want no thanks. Id's all fun to me. Och! be the powers," she exclaimed, in a tone of dismay, "here's the

Recthor. Sit on the stool near the fire. Now pull yer cloak about ye an' try to be aisy, if ye can."

Sall went to open the front door, but the priest was before her, for he had seen his friend passing the parlour window.

"I am so glad you are better, John," said Adam Glover, his face lighting up with genuine pleasure as he took the priest's hand in his. "Make haste and get strong, for I want the help of your clear brain sorely just now."

"Come in, Adam, come in."

"I can only stay a few minutes," said the Rector, standing in the hall. "I must go before sunset to the Hill of Kylenamanna. Our poor, misguided people are to meet the rebel Hinson there."

"But what possible good can *you* do?" remonstrated Father John.

"At least I can raise my voice and denounce this man, who is trying to lead my flock away from their duty and their God. John, you have got a plan of the secret Pass of Kylenamanna. I would like to see it."

"Come into the parlour, and I will show it to you."

Sally retreated to the kitchen.

"There, now, me aunt from Lim'rick," said she. "What do ye think av that?"

"I think," said Hinson, "we had better set out for the Mount Farm at once. If we pass through the chapel-yard they may not notice us from the parlour window."

"Sorra a bit av me stirs from this spot till Miss Bride comes back," said Sally, with an air of dogged determination.

Pushing the frills of the nightcap off his forehead, he looked keenly at the woman, his suspicions aroused by something peculiar in her manner.

There must be a cause for John Kennedy's treating this peasant as a friend. Could her refusal to leave until the return of the priest's niece have any connection with the secret said to exist in the chapel-house?

"Good-bye, then," said he as he rose from the stool. "I dare not stay longer."

At this moment the Rector came out of the parlour and approached the kitchen. "Sally," said he, "will you give me a glass of water?"

"Take some wine, Adam," said the priest, who remained behind at the foot of the spiral staircase.

"No, water will do."

"Who is that, Sally?" asked the Rector, as he saw Hinson standing in the middle of the floor, stooping low over the stick.

"Id's me aunt from Lim'rick, av ye plaze, Misther Glover. She's come all the way to see me afore she dies."

"At her age it must have been a wonderful undertaking."

Placing the glass on the table, he advanced to address some pleasant remark to the disguised Hinson; but Sally quickly went between them, and said in a warning tone:

"Av ye plaze, sir, don't spake to me aunt; she's both deaf an' dumb, an' she's that narvous that iv any man comes near her she shakes all over and falls into fits."

"How very sad," said he compassionately. "You must take great care of her while she is with you, Sally. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, sir."

Father John let the Rector out, and then went up the stairs.

Before Adam Glover had reached the entrance gate, he recollected a message he wished to leave for Bride Killeen, and turned back to deliver it. Pushing in the porch-door, which was only

closed to, not fastened, he walked straight into the kitchen of the chapel-house.

To his astonishment, he saw Sally leaning against the dresser shouting with laughter, and her would-be aunt, with head thrown back, draining a tumbler of porter. Now that the face was exposed by the falling away of the frills of the cap, he could not fail to recognise it.

"James Hinson!"

At these two words Hinson dropped the tumbler on the floor, and Sally ceased to laugh.

"James Hinson!"

Hearing the Rector's voice, the priest came down the stairs to see what his return meant.

"John, John, you harbour this man!" said the Rector reproachfully, as he pointed one finger towards Hinson, who stood mute by the table.

"What would you have me do, Adam? He sought food and refuge. I could not refuse him."

"John, this man has turned the hearts of our people from us. We must now stop him in his career."

Thus saying he approached the porch-door.

"What do you mean, Adam?" asked the priest, intercepting him before he could turn the handle.

"I mean to give James Hinson up to justice."

"You dare not," said Father John sternly. "Anyone who seeks shelter under my roof is sacred."

"John, my duty I owe to God alone," said Adam Glover, as his countenance glowed, and his mouth assumed a firm curve. "I am going to have this man arrested. Let me pass."

Enraged at this unexpected resistance to his will, John Kennedy flung himself passionately against the door.

For the twenty years that he had been intimate with Adam Glover, he had never suspected the existence of a certain latent strength of character hidden beneath the mild exterior of the gentle Rector, and now this opposition, coming on the priest with all the elements of a surprise, gave him a kind of shock.

"You dare not interfere with anyone in my house?"

"I dare act according to my conscience, and I mean to have this man arrested," said the Rector decidedly. "Let me pass, John; nothing you can possibly say will have any effect on me."

"Then, Adam Glover," cried the priest, almost

beside himself with rage, "you will have to pass this threshold across my body. Were the vilest wretch on earth to seek sanctuary under this roof, he would be safe while there was breath left in John Kennedy."

The Rector put out his arm towards the handle of the door. There was a brief struggle, but the match was unequal, for Father John, weakened by recent illness, grew faint, and reeling against the wall, would have fallen at the foot of the staircase had not Sally rushed forward and supported him.

Adam Glover looked down at the priest, hesitated an instant, and then went out.

Recovering in a few moments, John Kennedy freed himself from the arms which sustained him and leaned for support against the balusters.

"Wine! Give me wine!"

"Och! Father John, honey," entreated Sally, "do be aisy or ye'll kill yerself entirely, entirely."

He glared at her an instant, and then, forcing her from his path, entered the parlour. She heard the opening and shutting of the cupboard and the tinkling of glass. Then the priest came out in the passage again, and going through the

front door, closed it violently behind him and rushed wildly in the wake of the Rector.

“Och, wirrasthrue! och, wirrasthrue!” moaned Sall-o’-the-Wig, as, sitting down on the three-legged stool, she swayed her body to and fro. “Whativir am I to do? Och! I wish Miss Bride wud cum home.”

When Father John flung himself in the Rector’s path, Hinson slipped quietly out through the back-door. Glancing round to satisfy himself that he was unwatched, he pulled Jane’s frilled cap low over his face, wrapped the heavy cloth cloak closely about him, and passed hastily across the lawn in the direction of the chapel-yard.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PASS OF KYLENAMANNA.

WHEN Bride Killeen passed through the village on her way to Kate Mahon's, she found the road blocked with soldiers, and all the idlers of Lusmore clustered round them, gazing in open-mouthed admiration at their scarlet tunics. It was a novelty to see military in the valley, and the girl fancied it probable that on their march from Limerick to Knockbeg they had merely turned aside from the main road to seek refreshment in the village.

She entered the post-office and went directly to the counter, behind which Kate Mahon was standing, parleying with an officer.

"My good woman," said he, "my instructions are that you can give us information as to the whereabouts of the private path which leads to the top of the hill of Kyleneamanna."

"I may or I may not know the private path," answered the postmistress, "but the public one is open to you and your men."

"We have tracked the rebel, James Hinson, to this valley, and we know that he has fled for refuge to a deserted hut in a gorge of the hill. If you lead us to this hut by the shortest route, you will get your share of the Government reward offered for the body of Hinson, dead or alive. If you refuse to help us, you must be one of his accomplices."

Kate Mahon looked straight in the officer's face and then glanced beyond him towards the door. A soldier, who was leaning carelessly against a barrel, made a light rapid signal with his left hand towards his breast. As soon as the woman caught this movement, her manner changed instantly, and she turned to the officer with a smile.

"Money is a great temptation, sir; you promise me faithfully that I will have my share?"

"I promise you."

"Then if you wait two minutes until I attend to this young lady I will shut up my house and show you the path you want. Now, Miss Killeen, what do you require?"

"I have come about a letter," said the girl, and her lips trembled as she spoke.

"Walk inside, miss, please. You will excuse me a moment, sir, I won't detain you long."

As soon as the parlour-door closed after them, Bride grasped the postmistress by the arm, and said eagerly :

"You are not going to betray them for money?"

"Betray them!" said the woman. "How little you know me, Bride Killeen, to think I would touch their vile blood-money! I merely wanted to gain time. At sunset to-day the 'master' is to meet the heads of the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star in the hut of Kyleneamanna; if no one warns them of the soldiers, they will be all caught like mice in a trap. Rush, as fast as you can, and tell them to fly at once, and, above all, to keep as far as they can from the side of the valley leading to Knockbeg."

"But——" exclaimed the girl.

"Go, go," Kate Mahon impatiently interrupted. "There's not a moment to lose. Your lover is there also."

"But you promised the officer to take him and his soldiers to the secret pass."

The postmistress laughed sarcastically.

“Yes, I am going to lead them to the foot of the hill of Doonvarna, where there is a zigzag pathway and a deserted cabin. When I leave them there, even if they find out at once how I have fooled them, they will be sure to take the longest way back to Kylenamanna, through Baltore, and that will give us, at least, an hour in advance—plenty of time for our friends to escape. As for myself, they may arrest me as soon as they like after. Go, now.”

There was an impatient tap at the parlour-door.

“Presently, sir, presently; I am coming. Now, go,” she said to the girl.

Bride left the post-office and walked slowly through the line of soldiers. As soon, however, as she got out of sight of the village, she clambered over the nearest stile and ran across the fields as fast as she could towards the base of Kylenamanna. From the place in which she now stood, just a little way above her, rose the dark wood which covered the hill almost to its summit on this side of Lusmore.

Though the trees were not yet in full foliage, still they were so numerous and so closely massed that their shade seemed none the less impene-

trouble for lack of the leafy screen of the coming summer.

She stood an instant deliberating about the secret path. She knew it was somewhere to the left, but it was so long since she had used it that she was rather confused for the moment as to its bearings. She made two or three anxious attempts to find it, but in vain.

The perspiration rose to the girl's brow. She was losing precious time.

What if she couldn't find it until it was too late? The thought that the liberty, nay, perhaps the lives, of others depended on her movements, served to sharpen her brains and brought to her recollection how, when an adventurous child, she had made a way for herself through the underwood, which used to bring her out higher up on the secret path. She would try this way now.

Bride proceeded towards a point at about the middle of the outer row of trees, and then, stopping, searched in the lush grass until she came across a round, moss-grown stone. Counting twelve paces to the right of this stone, and afterwards twelve paces diagonally upwards through the trees, she reached a tangle of thick

underwood. Making a gap, she crawled through, and was in utter darkness. Carefully fastening the gap behind her, she advanced on her hands and knees for several yards forwards, the brambly undergrowth catching in her hair and dress, and the contact of the moist, dark herbage making her recoil as if at the touch of lizards or other cold, creeping things.

At length, with a sigh of relief, she emerged into a light, open space. Rising, she paused an instant. There was a circle of large trees round this open space in the depths of the wood, the blue sky shone clear above, and the ground was carpeted with luxuriant wild blossoms of varied hue. Bride did not linger long here, but hurried up the steep twistings of the winding path, at the opposite side which led higher up the hill. Presently she got out of the wood into the gorge, at the bottom of which was the hut where she had witnessed the midnight meeting. Pushing open the door she cried out breathlessly :

“Fly, fly for your lives ! The soldiers are after you !”

The men who were congregated inside crowded round the girl at these words.

“What is it, Bride ?” asked Gerald Moore, approaching her and taking her hands in his.

"Fly, fly!" she cried, "all of you; and be careful to shun the Knockbeg Road. You have not a moment to lose. The soldiers know you are here and are now seeking for you."

The men looked at Gerald as if expecting his commands.

"Dennis Ryan," said he, to the foremost of them, "lead the way down the secret pass, and let the rest follow you, one by one. When you reach the base of the hill, disperse separately to your homes. I must wait here for the 'master.'"

In a few minutes the hut was deserted by all, except Bride Killeen and Gerald Moore.

"Gerald," said the young girl, "you must not wait here. Kate Mahon has taken the soldiers round to Doonvarna; they will soon know she has deceived them purposely, and will be sure to find their way here. Oh! do, do, come away," she implored, putting her hand on his arm and trying to draw him towards the door. "I would never forgive myself if you were taken prisoner."

"I promised Hinson to meet him here at sunset."

"But Mr. Hinson must have seen the soldiers and will be sure not to come. Perhaps he is even now hiding at Uncle John's."

"If I thought so," said the young man, "I would go to Ned Delaney's. If anything prevented the 'master' coming here, I was to meet him at the Mount Farm."

"Come, then, come!" she said eagerly. "I will accompany you to the top of the hill and watch till I see you safe into the Mount Farm."

• "Dearest," said Gerald, "do not be uneasy about me. My uncle told me this morning he had authority for stating that no one belonging to this valley, however implicated in the late rising, would be molested in any way. I believe this leniency on the part of the Government is entirely owing to uncle's own exertions."

"How good of him," exclaimed Bride, "but he is always so good and so thoughtful. He doesn't know you are at all mixed up with it. Oh! I used to feel so pained at times to think that neither Uncle John nor the Rector knew what was going on."

Whilst speaking, they had been mounting the hill, and now they were on the summit of Kylenamanna, and the farms and snug homesteads were spread out like a panorama beneath them. The rarefied atmosphere gave a brilliant freshness to the young girl's complexion and

added lustre to her clear eyes, now turned gently upwards towards her lover's face. Touched by her beauty, he forgot, for the time being, both soldiers and conspirators.

"My best beloved," he exclaimed, "I am always longing to tell you how I love you, but we seem to meet only to part."

"Go, Gerald, go; you forget you must not stay."

"Why should I go? I am so happy here with you."

"But the soldiers must not find you near here. Oh! do go."

"I won't stir until you tell me when I am to see you again."

"Come to-morrow afternoon to the chapel-house, and after tea we will nail the rose-bushes along the wall of Uncle John's library."

"To-morrow afternoon! It will be so long till then. Must I leave now?"

"Yes, you must. I will be so anxious until I see you inside Ned Delaney's."

"When I am gone, dearest, remain here a little while longer. Wait until the men have got quite away before you descend."

Then Gerald left her and strode down the hill. He turned several times, and waved his

hand to her as she stood on the summit watching him.

As soon as she saw him enter the outer gate of the Mount Farm she was satisfied.

Bride lingered as her lover had wished her to do. Soon losing herself in happy thoughts, time flew by unheeded.

At length the sun began to set, and banks upon banks of purple and golden clouds rose in the sky to the west.

"It is sunset already," said she to herself, "and Uncle John and the Rector will be waiting for me. I must hurry away. Through the secret pass will be my quickest way home."

Glancing downwards to her left, in the direction of Baltore, she saw the gleaming of scarlet, and knew that the soldiers were about to ascend Kyleneamanna from that side. She laughed a gay laugh at the thought that, thanks to the *ruse* of the postmistress, they would only find an empty hut and a deserted hill.

Then she hastened back to the gorge, and, reaching the entrance of the wood behind the deserted hut, she sought for a fallen tree which marked the beginning of the winding path up

which she had ascended. Presently she was in the path, and dancing lightly along its zigzag tracery. She felt so blithe that she carolled a merry song all about birds and spring-time, as she scampered in very exuberance of spirits. Half-way down she flung her arms round the trunk of a tree, and put her lips to the rough bark.

“Oh, you dear old thing,” she cried, “I love you, and I love everything and everybody in the valley. There is not in the whole, whole world, another, a girl so much to be envied as I. Everybody is so good to me, and so fond of me.”

Then she laughed a full, gladsome laugh, full of contentment, as she pursued her way.

When she reached the foot of the winding path, where it widened into the open space, her eyes were dazzled for an instant by the sudden accession of light after the obscurity she had just left.

As she grew accustomed to the change, she drew back as she observed a prostrate form lying on the ground a few yards before her—a human form. Her heart shrank with a strange fear. Why had she a sort of intuitive foreboding which made her shudder? It was

the form of a man, apparently. It must be some native of the valley who had fallen asleep in this strange retirement, or a drunken wayfarer; but nobody knew this pass except natives; or, perhaps, it was some poor being who had met with an accident. At this reflection she felt ashamed of her hesitation and quickly advanced, resolved to render what assistance she could, and stooped over the recumbent figure.

As she recognised the upturned face a sickly shroud-like pallor overspread her countenance, her knees shook under her, and she slid to the ground with a moan of anguish, trembling and half-paralysed at the awful sight.

Adam Glover, the gentle Rector of Lusmore, lay on the sward, his placid face upwards, dead but still limp, his clothing saturated with blood, and in his left breast, just over the region of the heart, protruded John Kennedy's Cuban dagger!

With clenched hands and straining eyes, Bride Killeen gazed at the corpse of the murdered Rector. It seemed as if her soul had got a wrench. Had the world come to an end, or was she mad—raving mad? Who could have done this foul deed? And her uncle's dagger? What brought it there, thrust with the tell-tale

handle into the dear, unoffending, aged breast ? Suddenly an awful suspicion crossed her mind, freezing the warm current in her veins.

“Oh God!” she murmured in her agony, “not this—not this!”

A short quarter of an hour ago she was a light-hearted creature, full of rosy dreams of home and love, and now she found herself face to face with a dreadful tragedy, the worst guilt of which she must bury for ever in her own bosom. Her Uncle John’s dagger ! Oh God !

For her, then, no future, no love, no lover. Thenceforth, her life must be one perpetual sacrifice, one continued effort to hide this nameless horror.

The rustling of some small animal in the scrub hard by startled her, and set her in a new train of mind. The soldiers might come at any moment. She must not think. She must act, and that speedily.

With the bitterness that is worse than a thousand deaths, the bitterness of being alive and suffering through those we love, she rose to her feet and leaned over the Rector’s body. Holding in her breath, as if to gain courage, she put her hand forth. Twice she touched the dagger with the intention of drawing it from

his breast, and twice she recoiled, as if to do so would be desecration to the dead. Again she extended her fingers and clutched the hilt. What if the handle should come off and the blade remain behind?

At length, closing her eyes and compressing her lips, she put forth all her strength, and with both hands drew the dagger slowly but steadily out of the deadly wound.

With a gasp and a start, she opened her eyes, but closed them instantly again with a shiver, as she saw the blood dripping from the keen point.

A sickening sensation came over her, and she thought she was going to faint. But no, she must not faint. She must be strong—strong. Rousing herself she wiped the dagger, with a shudder, on the grass, and then wrapped it up in her handkerchief.

Kneeling down, she reverently kissed the dead man's brow.

"Forgive me," she cried, the tears welling to her eyes at last. "Forgive me. It is for *his* sake."

Then, on the stillness of the wood, she heard a voice shouting from the hill above her:

"Here, comrades, this way. I have found the path."

And she knew that the soldiers had discovered the secret pass of Kyleneamanna, and must shortly reach the open space, and find the body of the murdered clergyman.

With one backward glance, and one broken sob, she gazed for the last time on the face of the tranquil dead, and then plunging into the brushwood she got out of the wood to the foot of the hill. Her brain was half-dazed with grief and horror, but still her entire being was absorbed with one idea, one instinct—she must hide the Cuban dagger, hide it for ever, for *his* sake.

She hurried home across the fields, crouching behind hedges and trees when she saw anyone approaching.

When she reached the stile which led to the main-road, she heard the rattling of wheels, and the sound of merry voices.

Concealing herself in a tuft of tall fern, she waited.

A couple of low-backed cars came along—one loaded with Palatines, the other with Celts. They evidently had been fraternising in the town of Knockbeg, for they were bandying light jests from one car to the other.

As they drove by, a man with a strong, musical voice struck up “Paddies Evermore,”

and the rest joined in the chorus. Bride crouched lower amid the ferns, for she heard the rippling laugh of Emily Neville, who was riding towards the Castle, escorted by her cousin Richard.

They were talking of their wedding, which was to take place in the valley, and how the dear old Rector was to marry them, and how John Kennedy's niece must be one of the bridesmaids.

The girl behind the stile, as her hand wound round the handkerchief which concealed the dagger, shivered slightly at these words.

Then a fine, blonde peasant girl, one of the village belles, came by, bareheaded, coquettishly twisting a handkerchief between her fingers and teasing her lover, who was walking sheepishly beside her.

And Bride, as she listened to them, felt that for her there was no longer jest nor song, youth, nor love, nor marriage; for was she not the niece of a—— No, no! not even in her thoughts did she dare frame the awful word!

She neither met nor saw anyone else until she got to the chapel-house, where she found the front door wide open, and the house apparently untenanted.

With the one fixed idea still prompting her,

she hastened to her bedroom, and locking herself in, she went to the window where stood a large, old-fashioned writing-desk, which had belonged to her mother. Pressing a brass knob in this desk, a lower compartment flew out, and in this she placed the dagger, wrapped in her handkerchief. Then, hiding the desk away, she descended the staircase, when she heard familiar voices, and Sall-o'-the-Wig and Peter O'Brady entered from the porch.

"Och, thin, Miss Bride," said Sally testily, as she caught sight of the young girl, "wherivir have ye been at all at all? Musha, bud me heart's a'most broke lookin' for the masther. Father John an' the Rector had an awful row about Misther Hinson. Och, miss, Father John was in such a timper, an' looked as iv he could kill a hundert min whin he ran afther the Recthor, an' me heart's broke, for he's nivir cum back since."

"Bride, dear Bride," said Peter O'Brady, as he saw the girl's haggard look of anguish, "what is the matter—are you ill?"

"Peter," she moaned, "for God's sake, save him."

The editor of *The Avenger* turned ghastly pale.

“Good heavens ! what do you mean ?” he cried.

“Save him !” she murmured, and, for the first time in her life, Bride Killeen swooned away.

CHAPTER V.

NEVERMORE.

WHILE Peter O'Brady and Sall-o'-the-Wig were trying to restore Bride Killeen to consciousness, Jane, laden with a heavy basket and a large parcel, returned from her shopping excursion to Knockbeg. She entered the house, mumbling to herself some formula of incantation against black cats; but when she caught sight of the death-like countenance of her young mistress, she let her basket and parcel drop to the ground, and gave a loud scream.

"Howld yer whist, ye ould fool!" said Sally, frowning at her.

"Id's cum at last; id's cum at last," said Jane, wringing her hands and shaking her head.

"Is she kilt entirely, entirely?"

"Miss Killeen has merely fainted," said Peter

O'Brady. "Is there any smelling-salts in the house?"

"There is a bottle on Miss Bride's dressing-table," said Sally. "Go up an' fetch it, ye ould stupid," she added, addressing Jane, "an' don't stand gapin' there wid yer ugly mug open to ketch the flies."

The woman went upstairs, but came down again in a moment.

"Miss Bride's room is locked, an' there's no kay."

"Perhaps Father John is inside," said O'Brady. "You should have tapped."

"Bud the master ain't there," said Jane, "for whin I was a-comin' along be the avenny, I saw the library dure wide open, an' when I wint to shut id, sure an' iv I didn't see Father John a-lyin' on the soffy, fast asleep, just for all the world like a new-born babby."

At these words the editor of *The Avenger* gave a sigh of intense relief, and turned cheerfully to the young girl, whose eyes were now looking at him inquiringly, as she struggled back once more to life and memory.

"What is it?" she asked. "Have I been ill?"

"Only fatigued. You walk too much, Bride,"

said Peter O'Brady, aloud. Then, stooping to her ear, he whispered : " Everything is all right. Your uncle is asleep in the library."

The girl pressed her hand against her temples to collect her scattered thoughts, for her memory was still confused from her swoon.

" Miss Bride," said Sally, " you'll be betther afther having a sthrong cup av tay. Now cum upstairs, an' I'll brush yer hair a bit, an' make ye tidy, while Misther O'Brady goes to fetch in the masther, who'll be afther ketchin' his death av cowl, I'm afeart."

Bride rose mechanically from the chair, where they had placed her during the fainting fit. Resting her hand on the balusters, she strove to remember.

" Give me the kay, miss."

" The key, Sally. What key ?" she asked, bewildered.

" The kay av yer room, alanna. Id's locked id is."

" Thru for ye, Sally," said Jane, who had picked up the fallen basket and parcel. " I've been in this house iver since Miss Bride was so high"—here she put her hand within a foot of the floor—" an' I niver knew her to lock her dure afore. Id manes somethin' quare—id

manes somethin' quare," she muttered, with a side glance at her young mistress.

The young girl looked for an instant at the two women, and they saw her brows contract. Recollection came back to her with a sudden rush, bringing all the horror of what she had seen too vividly before her.

Oh God! the wood of Kyleneamanna—the murdered Rector—her uncle's dagger!

"Miss Bride, alanna," said Sally, catching her by the arm, "ye'll faint agin. Cum out in the fresh air, asthore."

"No, no—leave me alone." Then motioning the faithful Sally aside, she went out to the front of the house, where she saw Peter O'Brady walking leisurely across the grass towards the library. He evidently had not hurried himself in his mission to wake the priest.

"Peter, Peter!"

"Well, Bride," said he, as she reached him, "I hope you are feeling better, though certainly I must confess you look strangely unlike yourself."

Instead of answering, the girl glanced round in a quick, nervous way, and then approaching closer to the editor of *The Avenger*, she said, in a low, eager tone:

"Peter, we must hide this for ever from the whole world."

"How you tremble!" said he, taking both her hands in his. "Make your mind quite easy about our secret. We have managed to keep it for nearly three years, and I see no reason why it should be found out now."

"It is not that!" she exclaimed. "I mean this awful thing of to-day! Peter," she entreated, her eyes raised to his imploringly, "our lives, henceforth, must be devoted to one purpose—to hide this for ever—for *his* sake—for *his* sake." Then, glancing round her again, in the same quick, nervous manner as before, she said: "Oh God! should it be discovered! Think of his being dragged, manacled, through the streets of Knockbeg, with the crowd jeering after him! Think of—of the hangman——".

Here the beads of cold perspiration oozed from her forehead, and her eyes dilated with startled frenzy at the picture which her imagination conjured up.

Peter O'Brady watched her in puzzled amazement, half believing that she must be bereft of her reason.

"Bride," said he, "you are not well. Go, lie down, and have a cup of tea. What should the

gallows or the prison have to do with you, or any of us? I must get your uncle to send away that imbecile of a servant, if she is upsetting you with her superstitious nonsense."

The girl gazed at him mournfully, and then turned away without another word.

"Alone—all alone!" she thought. "Peter does not know. I shall never tell him. My heavy cross I must bear alone—all alone!"

There was dreadful consternation in the valley when the soldiers returned from the wood of Kyleneamanna, carrying the body of the murdered Rector. Tenderly and deferentially, within the village school-house, they laid their lifeless burden.

The fearful news spread quickly from mouth to mouth, and men, women, and children came streaming down from all sides. Peasant women along the high-road flung their aprons over their faces, and wept and moaned as if their hearts would break; and stalwart farmers sobbed aloud as the truth of the foul outrage was confirmed by the sentinel who kept watch outside the school-house door.

Woe to the unlucky wight of a tramp who should have been found wandering that night in

the valley of Lusmore ! In the blindness of their passionate grief, the people would have torn any suspicious stranger limb from limb, without leaving him time for shrift or trial. Not for an instant did they suspect that the bloody deed was committed by anyone belonging to the valley, for Protestant and Catholic alike loved the gentle Rector, and now, as they hung about the village in groups, talking with bated breath and awe-stricken faces of the tragedy, not one amongst them but would have given his life to restore that of Adam Glover. When they saw the Rector's nephew coming towards them, with rapid step and questioning look, the women burst out with fresh cries and lamentations.

“Ochone ! Ochone ! Masther Gerald, he's gone, he's gone !”

The young man faced the crowd sternly, and cried in wrathful tones :

“It is a lie ! My uncle murdered ! I will not believe it !”

“Och, avic,” quavered an old crone who was leaning on a pair of crutches under the shade of a spreading chestnut tree. “I've lived nigh a hundert year or thereabouts, cum wet cum dhry, in Lusmore, an' I nivir heard tell av a murther

in the valley afore. Put me on me knees," she said, addressing those near her.

Taking away the support of her crutches, two men helped her to kneel. For an instant she swayed her body to and fro, and joining her wrinkled hands, and turning her bleared eyes to heaven, she croaked in a voice half squeak, half groan :

"May the curse av God lie, wakin' or shleepin', on the murtherer av Adam Glover! May the grass nivir grow where he puts his fut, may the light of the sun be shut from his eyes, may his limbs be palsied, an' may his children's children wither like blasted corn !"

"Amin ! Amin !" came fervently from every side as the hag ended her curse.

In the meantime Gerald Moore entered the school-house.

A herd had brought tidings to Ned Delaney's that the body of the murdered Rector had been found in the Pass of Kyleneamanna. Gerald, who was waiting at the Mount Farm for Hinson, scoffed at the idea of anyone giving credence to such a foolish story.

The man persisting in the truth of his tale, Gerald, though incredulous, resolved to ascertain

what possibly could have given rise to such an absurd rumour.

When he reached the village, the excited, tearful crowd, gathered there, made him no longer doubt that something unusual must have happened. Pushing aside the sentinel, he made his way into a room where on a couch lay the corpse of his uncle, still covered with the blood-stained clothes. The young man stared, half-stupefied, at the tranquil face of the dead. He could scarcely credit the evidence of his own senses.

Murdered!—the gentle, the most inoffensive of mortals, who lived only to do good to others. Murdered!

“Who did this?” he asked of the soldier standing by.

“It is supposed he was stabbed by some of the insurgents in the secret Pass of Kylenamanna,” was the answer. “Our men are scouring the country in search of the assassins.”

The Pass of Kylenamanna! The insurgents! His uncle, then, was one of the victims of the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star! With feelings of newly-awakened loathing and repugnance, Gerald thought of the secret society which he

had joined nine months before, full of romantic dreams of a bright future for his native land. Now that this crime had come home so close to him, those men whom he had expected to turn out saviours and regenerators of Ireland proved, after all, to be but low and truculent cowards and assassins.

Should he denounce them ?

Then, remembering his oath, he almost sunk his nails into the palms of his hands with a gesture of rage and desperation.

During the night the police and the soldiers searched the country round, for miles and miles, but all in vain ; they did not meet with the slightest trace of the assassin or assassins. From earliest dawn, the wood was crowded by inhabitants of the valley, eager to find a clue to the murder of their beloved pastor ; but all their efforts were useless. There was not even the faintest trace of a struggle on the spot where the good old man had been stricken down in the kindly autumn of his life.

In the course of the day John Kennedy, leaning on the arm of Peter O'Brady, walked to the village school-house.

As they passed through the crowd the people, full of curiosity, watched Father John, to see how

he was taking the violent death of his friend ; but the proud priest's expression was severe and impassive, and, whatever his inward feelings, he showed no outward sign of emotion.

When they returned from viewing the dead, Peter O'Brady's eyes were full of tears, but there was no apparent change in the countenance of the priest.

"How they loved him !" said the editor of *The Avenger*, alluding to men and women who were sobbing and lamenting all around, as if each one had lost his or her nearest and dearest.

"Yes, Adam was one of the most lovable of natures," was the answer, given very quietly.

"Father John," said Ned Delaney, approaching, "was there ever anything so dreadful as this murder? Our valley is disgraced for ever. When I heard about it, I felt that I could never raise my head again. And Mr. Glover, above all others, who hadn't an enemy in the whole world."

"He is better off than we are. He is at rest," said the priest, as, disengaging himself from O'Brady's arm, he went towards the chapel-house.

"Musha," cried a woman, with an infant in her arms, as she looked after the gaunt

form—"Musha, iv we wor all at rest like that, whativer wud becum av the poor childhre, at all at all?"

Then, pressing her infant tightly to her breast, she commenced moaning and talking to herself about the murdered Rector.

The crowd gathered about the editor of *The Avenger*, sure of sympathy, and anxious to hear his opinion.

"Sure, an' whin will they let us see the poor darlin's face for ourselves?" asked a woman with the neat appearance and tidy hair which betokens a Palatine.

"After the inquest."

"Misther O'Brady," said a comfortably dressed man with round, listening eyes, and jaunty sit of the hat, "the landlords nigh an' about Knockbeg will be sayin' we did id, bud ye wor always the tinint-farmers' frind, sir, an' ye'll put id into *The Avinger* as how no farmer ivir kilt Misther Glover. Why maybe Misther Richard himself will think we did id, too!"

"Never fear, Dermot, never fear. The gentry will be certain to offer a reward for the apprehension of the murderer, but I'd advise you, Lusmorites, to be beforehand with them and offer one yourselves."

“Ay, ay, that we will,” came heartily from every side, “sure you’re rale clever to think av such a thing. Bedad, we will be afore the landlords.”

The inquest was held, and the verdict brought in was one of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown. The medical evidence was to the effect that the Rector had been pierced through the heart by a sharp-bladed instrument, probably a thin, long knife, and that death must have been instantaneous, and in all likelihood painless on account of the placid expression of the features, which was unusual in cases where death resulted from stabbing. When the inquest was over, a deputation waited on the coroner with a request from all the male inhabitants of Lusmore that they might be allowed one by one to touch the dead body of the Rector, and to swear a solemn oath that they had neither hand, act, nor part in his murder. To their grievous disappointment, the coroner refused, point-blank, to permit anything of the kind.

Adam Glover was buried in the pretty Gothic ivy-covered Protestant church where so often he had preached on his favourite text, “Love one another.”

Nevermore would the mild and beautiful

countenance, with its halo of silver hair, be seen in the valley of Lusmore.

Nevermore would the mellow brown eyes beam down from the oaken pulpit on the congregation beneath. Never again would they listen to the gentle voice, so full of sympathy and of sweet benevolence.

Like sheep without a shepherd were his flock deprived of their beloved pastor. Who would counsel them and help them now? Alas! who indeed? As Palatines and Celts wended their way homewards, side by side, from the grassy churchyard, they forgot their petty spites and everyday squabbles, and mingled their tears freely together, for all minor differences of creed and birth were swallowed up by this great personal sorrow.

Late that same evening, a woman's form, enveloped in a black cloth cloak with the hood drawn over her head, came to the newly-made grave and knelt beside it in the moonlight. The rustling of leaves close by startled her and made her shiver; but it was only the breeze in the blossoming may-bush which drooped over the Rector's resting-place. Reassured that she was not watched, she pushed back her hood and

revealed the pale face of Bride Killeen. The young girl flung herself forward on the cold turf.

“Forgive me,” she sobbed, “forgive me. It was for *his* sake—for *his* sake.”

CHAPTER VI.

PETER'S BIG POSTER.

ONE afternoon in May, about a month after the funeral of Adam Glover, a monster green poster, bristling with Brobdingnagian letters, was conspicuous on a dead wall in the upper part of the principal street in Knockbeg. The sun's rays blinked and danced merrily athwart the rows of glistening black type, still damp from the press, but as this quarter of the town consisted of private houses, no one had as yet noticed the placard, whose glaring prominence of size, of colour, and of position denoted something beyond the common run of trade or auction announcements. By-and-by, a hungry dog, baulked in its search of a bone, came wearily and dropping on its hind legs in front of the great sheet, snarled dolefully at it, as it were from

very spite in the venom of disappointed appetite. A minute afterwards two men were strolling along, absorbed in conversation, when one of them, annoyed by the snappish whine of the cur, raised his foot to kick it, but stopped midway, attracted by the black letters and their green background. A cursory glance sufficed to show the purport of the intelligence meant to be conveyed, and it had such an effect on the reader that he could only grasp his companion's arm convulsively, and utter the single word :

“Look !”

The other arrested his steps immediately and looked, and then both men, eyes dilated and mouths enlarged to the fullest extent, stood in stupefied posture, scanning the placard as if it were a *lusus naturæ*.

“What does it mean ?” at length ventured in a whisper the smaller of the two, a man with an abnormally large head surmounting a disproportionately puny frame. “What in the world is O’Brady up to now ?”

Previous to hazarding an observation, the taller man drew back a few yards, and with the air of a critic surveyed the placard from every point of view—first perpendicularly, then horizontally, and then diagonally. Drawing a breath

of relief, he laughed, and, in a tone which was perfect in its patronising consciousness of superior penetration, he said :

“Oh, it’s nothing after all ! A mere form. O’Brady wants to make a flaming speech on nomination day, and one can’t well do so, I believe, unless he goes through the farce of pretending to be a candidate. As to his really putting up to be a member of Parliament,” he continued pompously, “ah !—why it would be just as ridiculous as if *you* did so.”

The smaller man, Mat Maguire, flushed to the roots of his red hair at the emphasis laid on the “you,” but was too shrewd to retort. For years his sole ambition had been to achieve the honourable distinction of being town-councillor, and now that there was an available vacancy he could not afford, by a hasty word, to risk losing the vote and weighty influence of his very much respected fellow-townsmen, James Spillane, corn and seed merchant.

An awkward pause ensued, which was agreeably broken in upon by the advent of Major Silverthorne, who, attired in a brown velvet shooting-jacket and yellow silk knickerbockers, approached, and joining his hands behind his back, eyed the placard.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed.

"Well, Major," said the corn merchant, "what do you think of *The Avenger's* latest piece of rhodomontade?"

"Ah, Spillane, there you are! O'Brady setting up for the vacant membership! Ha—ha—the best thing I have heard this month of Sundays."

"But, Major," timidly put in Mat Maguire, "you know he can't be in earnest?"

"Why not? Who can have a better chance of succeeding than the priests' pet and the farmers' idol? Why, man, he ought to be able to clear the country before him. As to the landlords," he continued, with a shrewd shake of the shoulders, "they are too much afraid of the sledge-hammer articles of *The Avenger* not to lend a hand to O'Brady. Besides, I really believe they will support him, just for the fun of the thing. It's such a good joke."

"He can't have the confounded imp—audacity to mean it?" said Spillane thickly, making an effort to loosen his necktie, as if it were choking him at the same time.

"Eh! not mean it? I hope he does mean it, and will go through with it to the end," said the Major, in an animated tone. "O'Brady is the only bit of life we have in the town; we would

become ossified if he didn't stir us up now and then. By Jingo! I do envy the fellow his inexhaustible vitality."

"But he hasn't a brass farthing in the world!" gasped Maguire.

Silverthorne stuck his thumbs jauntily into the pockets of his vest and winked slyly at the two men before him.

"Come, come, my friends," said he, "you have no reason to be so down in the mouth. O'Brady is about giving you an opportunity of making some money. Without him there would be no contest, and the English shipowner, who published his address to you last week, would have a quiet walk-over. If Peter O'Brady has the pluck to go through with it to the polling-booth, this Englishman will either retire dismayed, or will have to bleed to the tune of some thousands to sustain the contest."

"But we don't want either the English merchant or his money?" impetuously burst in Maguire, who was the essence of patriotism in his own conception, and had imbibed with his mother's milk a wholesome indiscriminate hatred of everything Saxon.

"And I'm sure as to Peter O'Brady it's all a farce," said Spillane, in a more collected tone,

which, however, savoured considerably of spleen. "Why don't some of the old landed stock come forward to represent us?"

The Major drew out a cigar-case, selected a cigar, lit it, took a puff or two, and then spoke :

"I tell both of you, for a fact, that there is not a single landlord in the whole province of Munster would be mad enough to think of contesting an election in this infernal county. By Jove! in good old highway-robber times it was rather a ticklish alternative to have to hesitate between 'your money or your life;' but here you don't have even that choice, you risk money and life together. There, for instance, was my wife's uncle, who set up three times for this county, failed three times, lost three fortunes, has his estate heavily mortgaged, and is now with his family practising genteel economy in a small Continental seaport. There was my brother-in-law, who set up once, and, while quietly proceeding on his canvass, was flung, carriage and all, over a bridge into the river. Well, the horses were killed in the fall, and my brother-in-law thought himself very lucky in escaping with a broken leg. He has not yet succeeded in making out, to his satisfaction, whether the merit of this

fall is due to a fiery speech of O'Brady's, or to their reverences having denounced him from their altars the previous Sunday."

Mat Maguire's blood boiled. Much as the small man was flattered at the Major's condescension in conversing so familiarly with him, still Maguire felt wrathful, and ignored mere distinction of class when he heard his revered clergy mentioned in such a manner. "Sir," said he, squaring up before the Major like a little turkey-cock, "Sir, you may say whatever you choose of Peter O'Brady. That's his affair, and not mine; but I'll never stand here and listen to you or——"

"Maguire, be quiet, do," interrupted the seed merchant, in a soothing tone. "How can you expect Major Silverthorne to feel on this matter as we do?"

"But, Spillane," cried the choleric Mat Maguire, as he clenched his hand and then flung it out, "don't you hear?—he speaks of our priests as—as—as if they were common men like you and me!"

The Major coughed ostentatiously for the purpose of dissembling a smile of humour, which quivered on his lips.

"Come, come," said he, "I did not intend to

offend you. If I have said anything to hurt your feelings, I retract it."

Maguire was not half mollified, and he struggled visibly to control himself; for, while conscience urged him to speak out, policy kept him silent.

Gradually, while they had been talking, a crowd had collected around them—a mass of lively humanity of every grade and various ages, pushing, jostling, elbowing each other—some reading the placard, others commenting on it, a few in the immediate vicinity eagerly listening to the conversation going on between the Major and his two companions. It was a fair day in Knockbeg, and all the morning a bustling market had been held in a different street; but now that the great part of the business was over, the country people dispersed throughout the town, bent on having some fun before returning in the twilight to their comfortable homesteads in the surrounding hills. The crowd, gathered in front of the dead wall with its green placard, increased in numbers every moment, until at length the street was blocked up even to the pavement at the opposite side. The fair inhabitants of the adjacent houses, surprised at the hub-bub, came timidly to peer through the windows,

anticipating, in their excitement, that surely this must be a row or faction-fight after the fair.

A solitary horseman galloped briskly up the middle of the street, and reined his well-bred nag till it backed on its haunches on the outskirts of the throng. The new arrival was Ned Delaney, of Lusmore, and a splendid specimen of the best type of the Irish farmer he presented as he sat firm and straight in his saddle. He was dressed in a body-coat of gray, home-made frieze, with a short, wide cape of brown of the same material, hooked at the throat and slung half-carelessly across the herculean chest, leaving his bridle-arm free. He wore a pair of the finest corduroy breeches, fastened below the knee; and grayish-blue Angolan stockings displayed to advantage the muscular shapeliness of his leg. A black cashmere hat, poised jauntily on his head, gave an addition of arch frankness to the honest face which glowed freshly beneath it, beaming with health and animal spirits.

"Mr. Spillane," he cried out to the corn merchant, who nodded familiarly to him from the inner circle of the crowd, "what's it all about? I can't make it out from here."

"Oh, it's nothing, Delaney. Some nonsense of O'Brady's. Had you a good fair?"

"Middling."

"I say, Delaney," said Major Silverthorne, "what about the murder of the Rector? Anything new?"

"No, nothing, Major, worse luck."

"Ah," remarked the Major, "I thought the large reward we offered would have tempted someone to betray the miscreants before this; but you country fellows always stick by one another."

"I don't know what you mean," quickly returned the farmer, his independent nature disclosing itself by the sudden redness of his face and the tremor of his nostrils. "Country fellows as you call us, not one amongst us but would have given his life to save Mr. Glover's, and as for reward, we don't care a fig for the money of your *shoneens*." *

"Aisy, Delaney, aisy," cried out a wiry, squat man from the crowd. "You Lusmorites are too ready to blaze out for nothin'!"

"Faix, and that's more than can be said about anyone belonging to Father Rody Toole's parish," returned the former hotly. "You all bear the name of being the most cringing, lick-spittle lot in the county."

* *Shoneens*, paltry gentry.

"If I could get at ye, I'd soon let ye know who we are," yelled the other, in a rage.

"Come, come," called out a good-humoured voice; "we want no more of this. Spillane, will you be kind enough to read what O'Brady says for us? We can't see from here."

"Oh! I don't mind obliging you," said the corn merchant graciously, for the speaker was one of his best customers.

Spillane hemmed, and cleared his throat. When he began to read, the crowd hung breathless on the words which fell from his lips. In this wise the colossal notice ran:

"FRIENDS, FELLOW-TOWNSMEN, ELECTORS, AND
NON-ELECTORS:

"I ask you is our historic county to be handed over to the mercies of a Saxon merchant? The stranger has robbed us of the glebe, and stripped our granaries of their first-fruits; our corn, our cattle, our fish, the products of land and sea, are his. Shall we weakly lend sanction to his spoliation by accepting him as the representative of our yearnings, our principles, our rights?

"In your name, I answer a thousand times—no, never!

"Sooner than suffer such a disgrace to blot

your escutcheon, I make bold to offer my humble self as your champion in the British Parliament ; although, as you are aware, I have small faith in its sense of justice or spirit of fair play.

“I scorn to *mouth* pledges to you ; for you know me, and, knowing me, I believe you will honour me with your trust.

“I have lived and suffered in the midst of you. I am one of yourselves. Body and soul, I have been devoted to the cause—the cause of freedom—the cause of our common country !

“Need I tell you now that, if you choose me as your member, my motto will be, as it always has been, in the alien chamber by the Thames, as in our cottages by the Suir and Shannon—
IRELAND FOR THE IRISH AND GOD DEFEND THE TRUTH.

“Your friend, your servant,

“PETER O'BRADY.”

As James Spillane ceased to read, albeit he read without the fire that was needful to his text or the appreciating approval that would give it force—James was neither an advanced Nationalist nor accomplished elocutionist — a moment's silence fell on the throng, and then a wild, exultant cheer broke with a single impulse

from the throats of all present, and, as it died away, was caught up again and renewed until the air rang with the volleying applause.

Ned Delaney's horse seemed to share in the excitement; for it neighed, shook its mane, and pawed the ground impatiently. Ned himself, the colour coming and going on his face, and his eyes sparkling, shouted above the din:

"More power to O'Brady! We'll make him our member in spite of the stranger."

"Ay," added an enthusiast in the garb of a labourer, "in spite of the divel himself!"

"There's a martial ring in that!" said the Major.

"There's the right ring," shouted Ned, curbing his caracoling horse. "It's sound! Boys, one cheer more for O'Brady;" and the welkin echoed afresh with a tumult of enthusiasm.

While the corn merchant was in the act of reading the address, there appeared at the top of a side-street close by, the round form and ruddy face of Father Rody Toole. The people were too much engrossed in listening to take any notice of his reverence, and he, as soon as he had mastered the contents of the poster, stepped quietly back whence he had come.

A woman, with a dirty-bordered cap flying

half off her head, and a large basket, containing a few oranges, hanging on her arm, ran up, panting and frantically gesticulating, and cried :

“Run—run. Ye’re losin’ all av id. There’s Misther Pether O’Brady, the jule, speechin’ out av the balkinny av Connor’s Hotel. Sure, he’s goin’ to be our new mimber, an’ we’re to have mate, an’ land, an’ houses, an’ iverythin’, an’ nothin’ to pay at all at all. Run—run, can’t yez ?”

Here she darted off again, followed pell-mell by the crowd. Ned Delaney, heading them, galloped down the street, his short frieze cloak streaming like a battle-flag behind him.

When the place was completely deserted, Father Rody Toole again made his appearance at the top of the narrow side-street, and, first looking cautiously around, he approached the green poster. As he contemplated it, he bit his lip, and his face deepened to purple.

“Without consulting *us*,” he thought.
“Without consulting *us*, or asking *our* help.”

Then, compressing his heavy riding-whip in his palm, he stalked away in a direction different from that which the crowd had pursued.

A small boy, who was hiding in a gateway devouring an orange, had been spying the priest’s

movements with the precocious sharpness of the street Arab. As soon as the clergyman disappeared, this urchin made a sudden bound and a somersault, which landed him in front of the large placard.

With a yell, he tore the paper from the wall, and trampled it into ribbons.

“Hurroo!” he shouted. “Down with Pether O’Brady!”

There were symptoms already that the popular candidate would not run away with the victory.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE STILE.

DAYS and weeks go by, and the tragedy of Adam Glover's death would seem to be one more added to the list of those murders which are destined to rest for ever undiscovered.

The shadow of insecurity hovers over the valley of Munster, and its inhabitants already are beginning to peer at each other with a questioning air, as if seeking to know whose turn it will be next to be struck down amongst them.

The June sun shines with bland warmth on meadow and hill-slopes; and the hay-making season has come round once more. Celts and Palatines shoulder the scythes, and pass along tree-lined roads and through dewy fields to their daily toil; but no longer is their labour lightened by the elixir of happy laughter, no

longer is the clear air resonant with the sound of merry voices bandying joking words from one to the other. Side by side they work, either keeping a rueful silence or speaking in subdued tones; for he by whom they were so endeared, and who was so dear to them, who was always ready to listen to their petitions and help them with his advice, is no more. The new Rector has been installed for some time. He is a worthy man, well-meaning, but unsympathetic and narrow, and altogether unfitted to be the successor of their model pastor, whose creed was love and whose daily habit was untiring patience and benignity.

When Adam Glover's will was read, it was found that he had left all his property to his nephew, with the exception of his books, which he had bequeathed for the purpose of forming a free library for the inhabitants of Lusmore; his pictures, which were to go to his friend, John Kennedy, and his Indian puzzle-ring, which was a keepsake to Bride Killeen. The latter bequest was searched for in vain among the late Rector's possessions.

Shortly after his uncle's funeral, Gerald Moore moved to the Mount Farm. The inhabitants of the valley came by degrees to regard the

young man with coldness ; for, to those who did not belong to the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star, his conduct in refraining from joining in the hunt after Adam Glover's assassins bore an unnatural and unaccountable seeming.

"Bride," said Father John Kennedy, as he stood at the front window of the chapel-house watching the clouds chase each other across the blue sky, "let us walk over to the Mount Farm and see if Ned Delaney can lend us some of his men to mow the hill-meadow."

The girl, who was seated in the farthest corner of the room, apparently absorbed in the contents of a book, started at her uncle's voice, rose hurriedly, and went towards the door, saying :

"Very well, uncle ; I will just give Jane some orders, and then get my hat and scarf. I won't be a minute."

Suddenly, recollecting something, she turned back to where she had been seated, and took up her desk to carry it away with her.

"Bride," said Father John, as he saw this movement, "I believe you have some precious secret hidden away in that worm-eaten desk of yours. You can't bear it out of your sight.

Come, what is in it?" he added playfully, as he made a pretence of wrenching it from her.

Her face grew full of pain and terror, and, grasping the desk to her breast, she murmured, in an almost inaudible tone :

"Don't, uncle, don't."

"Child, child," said the priest, as he looked at her searchingly, "what has come to you? Are you ill?"

"No—no."

"I wish your mother were alive," he continued with a sigh. "It must be dreary work for a young girl to be buried here, all alone, attending to an invalid old man."

"I will never leave you, uncle, never," she said in a quick, passionate tone.

"Not even for Gerald?" he remarked, smiling. "Why, you have not quarrelled, have you?"

"No. I have not seen him since——"

"Since when?"

Alas! Since when? Her trembling lips refuse to answer and the anguish deepens within her eyes, as there passes before her all the horror of that awful day, when she came upon the body of the murdered Rector lying in the Pass of Kylenamanna. Again, in fancy, she plucks the dagger from his poor wounded

breast; again, startled by the outcry of the soldiers from the hill above her, she flies to hide the bloody weapon. Is it all a dream? Oh, God! no. For even now the desk, pressed closely to her bosom, contains the fatal dagger which haunts her dreams at night, and which is so jealously guarded by her during the day.

"Go, child," said the priest gently, "get your hat. The fresh air will do you good."

Father John was mystified at the change in his niece. She had grown strangely fitful of late, and he missed the even sweetness of a temper which could soothe him in his most irascible moods and sustain him in hours of depression.

While he was still wondering, his attention was attracted by Sall-o'-the-Wig, who was cutting capers on the gravel outside.

"Well, Sally, what is up now?"

"Och! Father John, honey, me heart is that full that I'm burstin' wid joy. Misther Pether O'Brady, the darlint av darlints, is there below in the village in a carridge covered wid green boughs, an' a flag a-flyin' wid the words 'Repale o' the Union' in shinin' goold letters, an' ivirybody is cheerin' him an' shakin' hands

wid him. Och! sure here comes the darlint himself."

With a whoop, she darted round the corner, and presently reappeared at the side of the vehicle, within which the editor of *The Avenger* reclined nonchalantly, legs crossed and head thrown back.

The priest smiled, as he came out to greet his friend.

O'Brady, alighting from the weather-beaten shandrydan, which Sall had dignified by the name of "carriage," grasped Father John's hand in his own.

"How are you, sir?" said he, "and is the health stronger?"

"Pretty well, Peter, pretty well. I am anxious about Bride. Ever since poor Adam's murder the child is sadly changed. She sits and mopes all day long, and I don't know what to make of her. I am thinking of spending the winter in South Italy. It will do both of us good to get away from our present surroundings for a while. How goes the canvass?"

At this question, O'Brady struck an attitude, throwing back his shoulders, and describing a wide semicircle with his hand.

"Sir," said he, "I've swept the county!"

"I am glad to hear it."

Sall-o'-the-Wig, who was occupied in the background, decorating the "carridge" with fresh boughs, now crowed with delight. Flinging a leafy branch high in the air, she cried:

"Hurroo! More power to our new mimber av Parleymint."

"Thanks, Sarah, my princess," said O'Brady, taking off his hat and bowing to her.

"Sir," he continued, addressing Father John, "I have been received with the greatest enthusiasm everywhere—everywhere. The landlords have promised me their support as well as the farmers."

"But the money, Peter. Where is that to come from?"

"Oh, that's all right!" said the editor carelessly. "The election won't cost me a single penny. If Downs is rash enough to proceed any further, my voters must only come to the poll at their own expense."

"Well, as you have nothing, you can lose nothing. How about the priests?"

"Of course I depend on them to back me up. By-the-bye, I have seen little of them lately. I have been so busy beating up the county, that I

have left the entire charge of the newspaper to my foreman, and he writes to me that the Shanty had been quite deserted during my absence."

"You have not heard from Father Rody Toole, of Drumbawn?"

"Not a word, nor from any one of them."

"Strange," said Father John, in a musing tone. "I don't like their silence. It is not encouraging. It bodes something."

"It can bode nothing worse than that they mean to remain neutral," said O'Brady cheerfully. "Ah! there you are, Bride," he added, as the young girl came to the porch and looked out at him with pensive eyes from underneath the broad brim of her Tuscan hat. "I have heard something that will interest you."

"Interest me?"

"Yes. You know the Indian puzzle-ring which was left you. Well, Reardon, the watchmaker at Knockbeg, declares that the Rector had it with him the morning of the day he was murdered. Now, if we could get a clue to the whereabouts of the ring, we might be able to trace the assassin also; for the ring was decidedly on the body when found in the wood."

Bride stared for a moment, stupefied, at

the speaker, and then, catching his arm, she whispered :

"Hush, Peter! Hush! Do not search for the ring. I do not want it."

"But——"

"Hush!" she interrupted. "Not so loud. Promise me, Peter, promise me that you will not say anything more about that ring!"

"I can't make you out at all, Bride," said O'Brady.

"Peter," said Father John, who had been talking to Sall-o'-the-Wig, "you had better leave your chariot in Sally's charge, and walk over with me to the Castle to see Richard Neville. Bride, you won't mind going on by yourself to Mount Farm?"

"No, uncle."

When they reached the head of the avenue-like road leading past Castle Neville, the priest arrested his steps, and laying his hand on his niece's shoulder, he said :

"Go now, little girl, and mind you return in time to pour out our tea for us. Peter, you won't find Emily at the Castle, for she has gone back to London. She has deserted us in our hour of gloom, but our Bride remains constant to us in sunshine or storm."

The two men strolled leisurely away from the young girl, and she halted an instant and watched the upright form of her uncle and the shorter, neater figure of O'Brady, until they were lost amid the trees. Then turning, she crossed the fields in an opposite direction, skirting the base of Kyleneamanna. As soon as she arrived at a meadow, on the incline of the hill close to Mount Farm, she seated herself on a stile and paused to collect her thoughts. The scent of the new-mown hay was around her, the luxurious bells of the purple foxglove clustered thickly on the ferny bank beside her, the delicate blue of the wild forget-me-not was crushed beneath her feet, and the mountain, smiling in the glow of the sun, rose to her left; but she saw none of all this, for nature no longer held its charms for her. Shading her face with her hands, she leaned forward. She heard the tinkle-tinkle of the hammer of the forge from the outer yard of the Mount Farm, and the hum of the men employed in the working-sheds at mending saddles, carpentering, and sawing wood. Was Gerald there? or how could she meet him before all these people? She shrank from the task which she had set herself. How was she to bid him good-bye for ever? What excuse

could she make for her apparent fickleness? She had schooled herself those weeks past to lay her own feelings on one side, but, womanlike, she must suffer doubly in seeing him suffer. Still men, she thought, were so different, and after the first pang he would have so many resources in himself to fall back upon; he would have his ambition and his future, while she—ah!

Two arms were around her, and two lips softly touched her bent head. It was Gerald, who had approached from behind and caught her on the stile.

“Bride, my darling, my own love! How good of you to be here so soon. You got my letter, then?”

“Your letter!” she said, raising her bewildered eyes to his. “I had no letter.”

“Never mind,” said her lover, “now that you are with me, that is all I want. Oh! if you knew how I have longed for you, how I have panted to see your face and smile once more.”

She asked herself how much harder he was going to make her task. Leaning against the stile, he took both her hands in his and gazed long and fondly at her.

“Dearest,” said he, “I have much to tell

you. Once for all, I am determined to break for ever with the Brotherhood of the Mystic Star."

"I am glad of that," was her remark.

"Ever since the base murder of my uncle, I have hated the ties which bound me to this secret society. Oh!" he exclaimed, with sudden vehemence, "for one hour, face to face with his cowardly assassin!"

The girl trembled at these words, and drew herself away from his embrace. She looked at the mountain, she looked at the sky, and then at the meadow beneath, and she thought of her uncle John and the blood-stained Cuban dagger.

"Gerald," she gasped, rather than said, at length, "might—might not a murderer, in some cases, be even more to be pitied than his victim?"

"To be pitied!" he said scornfully. "Pity for the dastard who, instead of meeting you, foot to foot, to fight it out like a man, goes, sneak as he is, to stab you in the dark! The hangman's rope is the extent of my pity for such wretches."

The hangman's rope! How often in the dead of night lately had the young girl started in her sleep, dreaming of the gibbet and the noose

dangling over her uncle's head ; and as she woke, bathed in perspiration, clutching her throbbing throat with her fingers, she has vowed that he must be shielded from even the faintest shadow of suspicion, and that the hemp must encircle her neck before his.

Gerald, who had stood erect whilst speaking of Adam Glover's assassin, now resumed his former lounging position against the stile, and, his face lighting up with affection, he said :

" Love, let us talk only of ourselves. It is such an age since I have seen your dear eyes, that I feel as if I could never tire gazing into them. Now hear my plans for our future. In a week I start for America. I go straight to the West, where Delaney's uncle has a large farm. I mean to buy some land there and build a home for my wife."

" But, Gerald——"

" Hush ! " he interrupted sportively, putting his hand on her mouth to prevent her speaking. " Let me finish. As soon as I have the house ready and see my way clearly before me, I will return here and take my darling back with me."

" But, Gerald," she exclaimed, trying to move his hand from her face.

" Listen," said he. " When I am gone you

must write to me every day, mind. You can address your letters under cover to Delaney's uncle. I will work so hard to make a home for you as soon as possible. Darling, how happy we will be when we are always together!" As he ended these words he moved his hand away from her mouth and, stooping forward, kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"Gerald," she cried desperately, "I can never be your wife!"

The young man smiled as he gently clasped her fingers.

"I know why you say that. You do not wish to leave Father John in his delicate state of health. I have thought of all that. We will make him give up his parish and come with us. The pure air of the far West will brace him and make him young again; and I will build him the snuggest library in America."

"But, Gerald, you do not understand. I can never—never be your wife."

He stared at her in amazement, and then it struck him that there was something unusually cold in her manner and expression.

"I do not understand," said he.

"I can never marry you, Gerald," she said

plaintively but firmly, and the tone of her voice and the dark anguish of her eyes awoke in him a deep disquietude.

"Not marry me? Why not?" he demanded.

"I—I cannot explain," was the answer.

Still watching her intently, he said:

"You will at least give me some reason for this change. Since the time of the midnight meeting at Kyleneamanna, you have never been separated from myself in my thoughts. I have always looked forward to a future spent with you. You told me that you loved me, and I believed you. Before you cast me off like a worn glove, I require an explanation."

"I cannot explain. Oh! Gerald, do not make it too hard for me," she said, with a glance of piteous entreaty up at him.

"Hard," he repeated, as he raised himself from his reclining position against the stile, and his face grew set and stern. His nostrils quivered, and he burst out vindictively: "Who is the other fellow, pray?"

"There is no one else," she said; "no one at all. I will never marry anyone in my life."

"Oh!" he cried in a rage. "I hate women!"

They are all false, shallow creatures, not worthy a man's wasting a thought upon."

Then he turned precipitately to leave her. When he had gone a few paces she stretched forth her arms towards him, and called out :

"Gerald, Gerald !"

At her pleading accents the young man's countenance cleared, and he hastened back and flung himself beside her.

"If you part with me in anger," said she, "my heart will break."

"My darling," was the impassioned answer, "I love you—I love you ; and love and trust like mine are not to be met with every day. Tell me that you were only trying me just now ; tell me that you did not mean what you said."

With a caressing motion she put her hands at each side of his face, and drawing him nearer to her, she gazed at him a few seconds tenderly and mournfully. Then she spoke, and though her eyes were dry her voice was full of tears.

"I did mean what I said, Gerald. We must part. Good-bye, dear love ; good-bye for ever !"

He rose from her side, looked down at her an instant, and then, without a word, strode rapidly away.

The tinkle-tinkle of the forge-hammer had ceased from Mount Farm ; the voices of the men erstwhile at work were stilled ; the fleecy clouds were breaking up into small, irregular patches in the sky, and the freshening breeze was heavy with the odour of new-mown hay. Yet, like a statue of despair, Bride Killeen remained seated on the stile, her straining eyes on the base of Kylenamanna, round which her lover had vanished from her sight.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONTEST.

It was in the days before the introduction of the ballot, when voters openly declared their opinions. Peter O'Brady had pursued his canvass with energy and ability; and had made a series of speeches, more remarkable for glowing rhetoric and rich humour than for common sense or definite purpose. But his imaginative listeners were so carried away by his flowery language, so amused by his fun, and so bewildered by his insinuating flattery, that they paid no heed to the deficiency of his matter.

The nomination took place at the close of one week, and the Monday of the following was appointed for the decision of the contest. The Sunday which intervened was a baleful one for the popular candidate.

It was polling day at Knockbeg, and the town was in an unusual state of ferment, for notwithstanding that the show of hands had been largely in favour of O'Brady, the Englishman persisted in his resolution to fight to the bitter end.

Early in the morning Mrs. Fogarty, of Baltore, drove over from the valley to the Shanty, and our friend of *The Avenger*, with his usual gallantry, placed his entire house at her disposal.

"I have told Judy to prepare lunch for you and get you whatever you may require," he said, as he conducted her to a spacious room on the first floor, with windows commanding a full view of the street, through which the electors must pass on their way to the booth.

"Oh, thank you," said Mrs. Fogarty, as she gracefully spread the ample folds of her violet poplin dress around her before seating herself. "Don't trouble Judy. I have brought a hamper in the well of the car with a ham and a couple of roast chickens. I called at the chapel-house, but couldn't prevail on Bride to come with me. Sally Breen is coming later on with the voters."

"We expect some sport to-day," said the editor, as he leaned his back against the shutter, "so don't be surprised if you see Doctor Martin here. I have also sent for Rougham, the skull-

mender, in case extra assistance might be required."

"Dear me! You don't expect there will be fighting, do you?"

"Nothing of any consequence. Besides, you know a man's education is not properly finished in Munster until his skull has been cracked at least three times."

"Now don't, Mr. O'Brady. I know you are only joking when you say such shocking things. But is it really true what I have heard this morning about the priests?"

"What did you hear?"

"Why, they say you were denounced from nearly every altar after mass on yesterday."

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. Then he changed colour as he remembered the absence for the last couple of weeks of the country priests, who used to come so regularly to the Shanty on post-nights to help him to edit *The Avenger*. "Impossible!" he repeated. "Why should they denounce me? I am their friend and a Catholic by race, and the man who is against me is only a fledgeling Catholic and a stranger."

"O'Brady," cried Major Silverthorne, who entered hastily at the moment, "what the deuce are you wasting your time for here?"

There's Downs' agent making a speech and calling you all sorts of names round the corner. Ah! Mrs. Fogarty, excuse me, how do ye do?" he added, approaching her. "You are looking blooming. You valley folk beat our town girls hollow in the matter of complexion. Is it real red and white now, or manufactured?"

"Oh, Major! you're as bad as ever, you flatterer, you."

"'Pon honour, no; I am downright in earnest. And where is that fine girl, Father Kennedy's niece—why isn't she with you?"

"I couldn't prevail on Miss Killeen to accompany me."

"By-the-bye, O'Brady, why are the priests dead against you?"

"I cannot believe it."

"Well, never mind, at any rate you can count on the farmers. Come along, old fellow, you must give Downs' chap round the corner a taste of your tongue. Ta-ta, Mrs. Fogarty; I expect to see your fair face several times in the course of the day."

"To be sure, Major, and won't you have lunch with me, and try one of our Lusmore hams? A thousand times sweeter than anything to be got even in Limerick, I promise you."

There was a tap at the door, and, on opening it, they saw a young priest on the landing outside.

“Father Terence Delaney?”

“Yes, Peter,” said he, entering, “it is I.”

Then glancing at Major Silverthorne, he added: “Major, would you mind going downstairs and leaving me alone with Mr. O’Brady for a few minutes? I will not detain him long.”

The Major, with a knowing nod at O’Brady, disappeared. Mrs. Fogarty rose from her chair, and said:

“Had I not better go also?”

“No, no,” interposed the young priest; “you are one of ourselves. Do not stir, I beg of you.”

“What is the matter, Father Terence?” asked the editor.

“Peter, we have grown up together, and you have been always dearer to me than my own brother. How can I tell you how pained and humiliated I feel at what has happened?”

“Happened! I do not understand.”

“Then where were you at mass yesterday?”

“At Lusmore. I went to the valley to tell Father John how James Hinson had been arrested on Saturday morning and lodged in Kilmainham

jail. I dined at the chapel-house, and went afterwards to see Richard Neville, and didn't return home till very late last night."

"Then you don't know?" said Father Terence, with a look of intense distress.

"Know what?"

"That we all had the most stringent orders to speak against you yesterday from every altar in the county, and were directed to warn our flocks that if they voted for you they should be under the ban of the Church's displeasure."

O'Brady's lips resolved themselves into a thin bloodless line at these words.

In spite of his rollicking good-humoured ways, there were those who maintained that, under pressure, he could be dogged and resentful.

"And pray what have I done to deserve this?" he asked.

"I do not know."

"And you, Terence, what did you say about me?"

"I!" exclaimed the young priest, with surprise. "I, Peter! how could I say anything against you? It is seven years since I have taken orders, and this is the first time I have disobeyed the Church—the first time. But I would have died before I would have uttered a

word to turn the hearts of the people against you."

"More fool you, then," said the editor, with a quiet cynicism. "You have destroyed all chance of your getting a parish."

Major Silverthorne, who had been below cooling his heels in the hall, waxed impatient at the delay, and, rushing upstairs, played a tattoo on the door.

"O'Brady, O'Brady, what the deuce are you up to? You have no time to waste. Come along!"

"Good-bye, Father Terence," said the editor, shaking the priest by the hand. "Tell them from me that, no matter what the result of the election, I bear them no rancour."

The words were politic, but it would not be in human nature to expect them to be sincere.

"O'Brady! O'Brady!"

"Coming, Major, coming."

O'Brady was astounded to hear that the priests had rallied to the opposite camp. He couldn't account for it, and he wondered if he had, after all, made a great mistake in setting up as member without first consulting them. However, it was too late now to think of this. He must go on; there was no turning back.

The country priests on their side, when they heard that one whom they looked upon as their creature was about to act independently of them, received the unexpected news with a mixture of annoyance and amazement.

What, without their permission ! Without even telling them what he was going to do ! Fool, they would let him see how weak and helpless he was, when not backed up by their influence. They would teach this unruly child a lesson, which would have its effect on every Catholic in Ireland. A conference was hastily convened, and a plan of action determined on. Some of the younger priests were inclined to murmur at the private instructions sent them with respect to the coming election ; but were soon overruled by their superiors, who informed them that their duty was to obey and not to think for themselves.

A communication was sent to Mr. Downs and his agents, to the effect that the Catholic clergy intended to give their support to the English merchant ; but they did not wish their decision to be known to the public at present.

On the advice of Father Rody Toole, the result of the conference was kept strictly private from the parish priest of Lusmore. They all

had a dread of Father John Kennedy, with whom even his lordship the Bishop was shy of interfering.

They knew well that Father John would not alone not join them, but might possibly contrive some expedient to thwart them and cause O'Brady to be returned in spite of their endeavours. Now, this would be a terrible blow to their authority, and they must work, might and main, to prevent such a catastrophe.

During O'Brady's canvass, the Catholic clergy held quietly aloof; but this was merely an ominous lull before the storm, for, on the Sunday previous to the election, the editor's senseless conduct was rebuked in severe terms from nearly every altar in the county. Thus, by not showing their hand until the last moment, the priests prevented any organised opposition being got up against them. Had the landlords suspected that the Catholic clergy would be against O'Brady, they would have chosen one of their own class to represent them, for they took no interest in the candidature of the English merchant. And now, though some of them in the neighbourhood of Knockbeg intended bringing in their tenantry to vote for O'Brady, most of them decided on remaining passive lookers-on at an

election, which gave promise of an element of originality totally distinct from the experiences of former scenes of the kind.

It was noon when Richard Neville, of Castle Neville, rode into Knockbeg at the head of his tenantry.

The farmers of Lusmore shook their heavy riding-whips defiantly and shouted for O'Brady, as they dashed in the wake of their young landlord. Behind them, in a low-backed car, came Sall-o'-the-Wig, her dishevelled locks streaming in the breeze, her fiddle stuck firmly under her chin and her whole body keeping time to the music, as she rattled away at the lively strains of the "Rakes of Mallow."

From the opposite direction came Father Rody Toole, on foot, leading his parishioners. Though he had launched all the missiles of impressive invective on Sunday at the heads of his flock, if they dared vote for O'Brady, still when it came to the critical point his reverence found it no easy task to bring the reluctant farmers to the poll. As soon as they reached the outskirts of Knockbeg, they hesitated, and wanted to return home; but Father Rody was too astute a tactician to allow him-

self to be so easily circumvented. Sending his two curates to the rear to hurry up recalcitrant laggards, by dint of threats and persuasion, aided by the force of his will, he managed to draw them towards the polling-booth.

When Father Rody Toole recognised the Lusmorites careering down the street, shouting exultantly for O'Brady, his countenance darkened, and he called out to his parishioners to give three cheers for Downs—a call which was responded to by a feeble and faint-hearted cry.

Surprised at this, Ned Delaney spurred his horse to the side of the small, wiry man, with whom he had some words the day they noticed the green placard on the dead wall.

“What do you mean?” said he. “Of course, Moylan, you have all come in to vote for O'Brady.”

“Whisht, whisht!” said the man in a low voice, looking apprehensively in front towards Father Rody. “Peter O'Brady is against the priests, and Father Toole says he is a traitor, and all their reverences about are against him, and we'll not have a day's luck nor grace unless we vote for the other one.”

“Och! ye mane, ungrateful spalpeen,” cried

a fruit-woman, as she shied a handful of her fruit straight at the speaker's eye. "If it worn't for Misther Peter O'Brady ye wouldn't have a roof over yer heads, half av yez."

"I can't believe you're in earnest, Moylan," said Delaney. "And as for O'Brady being against the priests, that's as big an electioneering lie as ever I heard, and I have heard some whopping ones. Why, hang it," he added, sharply, "can't you look a man in the face, while he is talking to you? I don't think there's an ounce of spirit in the whole parish of Drum-bawn, and, by this and by that, not one amongst you will return home to-night without a broken head if you go against O'Brady."

"Keep back! Keep back!" cried a mounted police sergeant, as he rode between the two parties.

"What for should we kape back?" screamed Sall-o'-the-Wig, who had dismounted, and now flourished her fiddle within an inch of the policeman's horse, until the restive animal reared and plunged and sent its rider bobbing up and down. "Darby Moylan," she yelled at the top of her voice, "they say yer wife bates ye; but Sall-o'-the-Wig will curl yer hair for ye afore ye lave the town. Yah! ye turncoat, ye."

Father Rody Toole, who for some minutes had been vainly trying to force a passage for his followers through the surrounding throng, now turned to Sall, and said sternly :

“Woman, I am ashamed of you.”

“Faix, thin,” she retorted saucily, “iv yer rivrence is ashamed av me, I’m more ashamed av ye. I nivir turned me back on an ould frind for any sthranger.”

“You impudent hussy,” said he, “are you not afraid I’ll——”

“Musha, thin, Father Rody,” she interrupted, with a sly glance over her shoulder at the Lusmorites, “ye ain’t goin’ to exkimunicate me, as ye threatened to do wid Kitty Brady’s son whin ye caught the gossoon playin’ pitch-an’-toss in the fields in place av sayin’ his catechis. Arrah ! yer rivrence, sure I ain’t in yer parish.”

“Keep back ! keep back !” again cried the mounted police sergeant.

The electors came pouring in from the adjoining districts ; many Catholics, headed by their priests, giving stifled shouts for Downs, while others, principally from Lusmore, and the Protestants, led by their landlords, gave responding cheers for O’Brady.

Twice had Ned Delaney been to the Shanty with bleeding head to put himself in the hands of the skull-mender ; but, eager for the fray, the sturdy farmer would scarcely allow time for his wounds to be bound up before rushing forth again with the war-cry of " O'Brady and Lusmore for ever ! "

Mrs. Fogarty, from her post at the window, shuddered as she watched the movements of Sall-o'-the-Wig.

Sall, having first smashed her fiddle on Darby Moylan's cranium, and finding herself minus a weapon for attack or defence, plucked off one of her long stockings, and thrusting a large stone into the foot of it, wound it quickly above her until it became a most formidable sling, with which she could knock down anyone who shouted for Downs in her hearing.

Seeing Mrs. Fogarty, she entered the Shanty, and bounded up the staircase.

" Arrah, ma'am," said she, " I'm that mad that I could murther twinty min. Think av Misther Pether, that darlint av darlints, an' all their rivirences against him."

" Hush, Sally, hush ! " said Mrs. Fogarty. " There must be some mistake. I have been trying to say my prayers to keep my thoughts

from straying. This is all very dreadful—very dreadful indeed.”

“Musha, ma’am, I’d like to be a black Prodestan’ for wan half-hour.”

“Hush, hush! we are both good Catholics, Sally. You must not talk like that. Everyone is excited at election times, and all will come right in the end. I’m so sorry Mr. O’Brady set up for a member, without consulting the priests.”

“Faix an’ I’m not sorry, ma’am, for it will make him find out who is his frinds and who ain’t. Och! musha, if I wor a Prodestan’ for half an hour, wouldn’t I give some av them such a foin batin’.”

At this moment someone underneath the window gave a cheer for Downs, which woke Sall’s ire. Darting down the stairs, she rushed forth with her sling, seeking new victims.

“Dear me! dear me!” said Mrs. Fogarty to herself. “How dreadful!”

The day wore on, but, notwithstanding the frantic and almost superhuman efforts of the partisans of Downs, O’Brady kept steadily at the head of the poll. The time was drawing very near when the contest must be ended, and Father

Rody Toole grew desperate at the bare possibility of a defeat.

The parish priest of Drumbawn knew how to play on the nature of the Irish peasant. He was no dreamer, to pause in the moment of action, and ask himself if the means resorted to now to influence the intelligence of men might not breed passions such as he, when all too late, might be powerless to repress.

Father Rody Toole had worked very hard all day, pressing forward to the poll the waverers, whose pastors were less active than himself. From street to street he hurried, alternately coaxing and commanding. But the fatal hour was drawing closer and closer, and still O'Brady kept steadily ahead of Downs.

An ominous shadow had settled upon the face of the priest of Drumbawn.

What? was the Church to be set at naught by a penniless recreant like the editor? From the telegrams to hand from the polling-towns in the county, it is evident that the result of the contest must now depend entirely on what happens in Knockbeg. A hundred Catholic electors are expected every moment from a remote district beyond the hills. Will they arrive in time, and will they vote for Downs?

Their parish priest is a very old man, too debilitated to travel such a distance with his flock, and his only curate, though pious and meek, has occasionally shown signs of having an opinion of his own. What is to be done? There is a rumour that O'Brady is preparing to set out in advance to meet the hundred electors and address them. What if he should succeed in leading them to the polling-booth? All the blood in Father Rody Toole's body seems to rush to his forehead and fix itself there at the mere thought. Hurriedly seizing on a horse which is standing by, he vaults on its back and shakes his loaded whip with an emphatic gesture. He will be beforehand with O'Brady, and beard him even in the sight of these men for daring to set himself in opposition to the wish of his clergy. Just as the horse makes a bound forward, a casual sentence uttered behind him turns the current of his ideas.

"Father John Kennedy, of Lusmore, is not here to-day," said a voice.

It was an attorney who was one of the agents of Downs.

"Ha, Lahey! that you? I hope he may not come. 'Twould ruin us."

"As he isn't here, maybe I can take O'Brady

out of the way if you authorise me, Father Rody," said the attorney.

"With a heart and a half," answered the priest. "Get him off if you can. You know, Lahey, it is your duty."

"All right," said the man of law, adding to himself as he moved off, "all is fair in love and war and politics."

Now this Lahey, who was an adroit and unscrupulous practitioner, had some inkling of the mystery of the chapel-house. He knew that in spite of O'Brady's free-and-easy bearing and plausible volubility, he had never been trapped into the faintest admission of the secret which had hung over Father John Kennedy's life for the last three years. No matter what business or amusement he might be engaged at, he was sure to leave everything on receipt of a sudden message from the chapel-house. Lahey smiled as he remembered this. Calling a man to him, he stopped and whispered something in his ear.

"But, sir," said the man, scratching his head with a defiant air, "it would be a lie."

"Lie!" thundered the attorney. "I tell you to do it, and when I do so there can be no wrong."

"Bud, iv Misther Pether O'Brady won't believe me?"

Again the attorney said a few words, in a low tone.

On one post-night, at the Shanty, he had noticed how the editor grew strangely agitated and disturbed on receipt of a note, brought by the servant-boy belonging to the chapel-house of Lusmore. After reading it, O'Brady made some excuse and hurriedly left; but in his haste he dropped the scrap of paper, and Lahey deftly took possession of it. To his surprise, it only contained the single word, "Rosaleen."

Who and what was Rosaleen? or how was it that a mere name should produce such an effect on the volatile O'Brady?

Hard by the court-house, underneath the shadow of Madame Justice and her badly-balanced scales, stood the editor of *The Avenger*, looking radiant at the prospect of coming success. He was chatting gaily with Major Silverthorne, and was encircled by several Protestant landholders of the neighbourhood, who were congratulating him on the very favourable state of the poll. A jaunting-car, decorated with green boughs, was waiting to convey him to meet the

hundred expected electors whose united votes would crown him with the dignity of senator.

O'Brady felt as if he must have risen in height and enlarged in breadth within the last few hours; his heart pulsed joyously beneath his white tabinet waistcoat, and he laughed pleasantly as, putting his glass in his eye, he gazed from one to the other of the gentry around him as if to say:

"I am your member now, the superior of all of you, and it has not even cost me one sixpence."

A man edged his way through the crowd and approached him.

"Av ye plaze, sur," said he, "yer wanted at wanst at the chapel-house."

All the brightness passed from the editor's countenance as he fixed his eyes sharply on the speaker.

"I am wanted at Father John Kennedy's? And who sent you?"

"Miss Killeen, sur, an' av ye plaze, yer to come at wanst—at wanst."

"O'Brady," said Silverthorne impatiently, "this is only a *ruse* of the enemy to get you out of the town."

"Stand back, Major, I must speak to this man alone."

When his friends had retreated beyond hearing, he said :

"Have you any message?"

"Sure, sur, av ye didn't come the first axin', I was to say 'Rosaleen.'"

The editor gave a deep-drawn sigh. It was so hard to have to give up all at the last moment; but, at no matter what sacrifice, he must leave at once.

"My friends," said he, advancing, "do the best you can for me. My presence is required elsewhere."

"Confound it, O'Brady," cried Major Silverthorne, in a rage, "you're not going to throw up your hand like that. Why, man alive, you must be stark, staring mad!"

"Do the best you can for me," repeated the editor, as he got on the jaunting-car. "Now," said he to the driver, "for your life to the valley of Lusmore, to Father John Kennedy's."

Father Rody Toole was triumphant, for he succeeded in bringing the hundred electors to the poll and making them vote for Downs.

When O'Brady returned to Knockbeg, after finding he had been duped by a false message, all was over, and the Englishman had won. As soon as the priests were assured of victory they retired from the town, and left their flocks to take what care they could of themselves. The shopkeepers prudently put up their shutters and fastened their doors, for the farmers, maddened by overwrought temper and fiery liquor, were running amuck through the streets.

The editor of *The Avenger* slipped unnoticed into the Shanty. Mrs. Fogarty had gone home some time ago, and the house seemed deserted by everyone.

There was no denying that O'Brady felt sorely disappointed, and his reflections were tinged with bile as he glanced around the empty room, where so often those, who had worked so strenuously against him to-day, were welcomed and treated to the best he had. But nothing could long damp or depress the buoyant spirit of the defeated candidate, so with a quick whistle he tossed back his brown curls, and, drawing a sheet of foolscap towards him, he prepared to compose the leading article of the forthcoming *Avenger*.

Dipping his pen in the ink, he wrote, with a flourish, the words :

“ ALL IS LOST SAVE HONOUR.”

Before he could proceed farther, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and, turning, he saw James Hinson.

“ Ah ! ” ejaculated the editor, as he recognised the new-comer ; “ this is a surprise. I thought you were fast under lock and key in Kilmainham jail.”

“ No prison in Ireland could hold me longer than forty-eight hours. I have escaped.”

“ But how ? ” asked O’Brady.

“ It does not matter now. I come to speak about the election. You have lost through the priests.”

“ Well, what if I have ? It was my own fault ; I ought to have consulted them first.”

“ Tush ! ” said Hinson, with an incredulous sneer. “ You cannot deceive me with words. Will you join *us* ? ”

O’Brady threw himself carelessly back in his chair, and, adjusting his glass, scanned his visitor’s shabby attire.

“ What is to be gained by joining you ? ” he asked, after a while.

"Many things," was the answer. "Join us, and we will give you ample revenge for what has happened to-day."

There was silence for a few minutes, and there was no knowing what reply the editor of *The Avenger* might not have been tempted to make to this offer, had not the sound of rapidly approaching footsteps caused him to leap to his feet to prevent anyone from entering.

"Quick!" he cried to Hinson. "Quick! hide behind the door. You may have been tracked here."

Hinson drew back close to the wall, and pulled his hat over his eyes to conceal his face.

"O'Brady! O'Brady!" came a voice from outside.

"Coming, Major, coming."

"We want you, O'Brady," said Silverthorne excitedly, as the owner of the Shanty met him in the hall.

"Want me! What for?"

"Why, the whole town is gone delirious, and the police and the military are out, and the Riot Act is being read, and the people are like drunken devils, and the farmers of Lusmore have beaten the farmers of Drumbawn to a jelly, and—and——"

"And what?"

"We want you to speak to them out of the window of the hotel; it might quiet them down a bit, and prevent more bloodshed."

"But what can I do?"

"You must palaver them, you dog," said the Major, poking him in the ribs with his cane. "Come along, you don't need lessons from me to tell you what to do or say. By Jove," he added, chuckling, "this infernal election will cost the Englishman at least ten thousand pounds."

"Then," said the editor of *The Avenger*, with a sprightly smile, as he thrust his hat jauntily on the back of his head, "I have caused this money to be spent, and I am the benefactor of the county."

"Bravo, O'Brady, bravo! That's your cue. Why, it's quite an inspiration. Come along, come along quickly."

CHAPTER IV.

“ WHERE IS MY MONEY ? ”

It was late in the afternoon of the day following the election, and the postmistress of Lusmore was busy behind her counter sorting letters.

Some of her regular customers, both farmers and labourers, were seated on stools and forms about the shop, drinking and gossiping after their work.

“ Have you heard the news, Mrs. Mahon ? ” asked the man nearest her.

“ What news ? ” she exclaimed, raising her head sharply. “ I have heard nothing.”

“ Why, they say that when the warder at Kilmainham jail, yesterday morning, went to call Hinson, he found the door locked as usual, but the cell was empty.”

“ But Mr. Clarke has escaped also, has he

not?" said the postmistress, as a gleam of exultation shot through her eyes.

"No; Mr. Clarke is still in Kilmainham; that's what makes it look so queer for Hinson, because if he could get out himself he might have helped his friend off, too."

"My missus was in Knockbeg this mornin'," remarked a sunburnt labourer, as he wiped the sweat from his forehead with a red cotton handkerchief, "an' sure they say there that Hinson has turned stag, an' has sowld the cause an' his frinds to Dublin Castle, an' that his getting off is all a make up to put ivirybody off the scint."

On hearing these words Kate Mahon began to tremble, and the letters slipped from her loose grasp to the ground. Stretching out her hand to steady herself, she caught at the shelf behind her, and knocked down some bottles.

The farmer next her sprang across the counter to pick up the papers from among the broken fragments of glass.

"Here's a letter for Miss Killeen, with the Queenstown post-mark," said he, as he rubbed the dust off the envelope with the sleeve of his coat, and scanned the directions. "That'll come from her sweetheart, Gerald Moore, I'll be bail."

A red hand and muscular arm was thrust in behind him at this moment.

"You be bail for nuthin' av the sort," said Sall-o'-the-Wig, snatching the letter, and shoving it quickly into her pocket. "Av ye plaze, Mrs. Mahon, Father John Kennedy sint me for his letthers an' papers, an' three dozen av stamps."

While the postmistress was selecting Father John's correspondence from amongst the others, a step was heard on the road outside, and Pat Mahon entered rapidly.

"Mother," he cried, "I must go back to Dublin to-night."

"This is only Tuesday," she said, surprised, "and your week's holiday won't be up till Saturday next. Indeed, Pat, I was going to ask you to write to your employers to see if they'd let you have an extra week, for you are not looking at all well."

"I must be in Dublin before to-morrow morning. The firm want me on most important business."

Sall, who had been watching the ex-school-master with an air of affected admiration, now advanced in front of him, and, holding out her short skirts, dropped a meek curtsy.

"Musha, thin, yer lordship, what kind av a

convayance wuld shute ye to go to Dublin in? Will ye have yer coach-an'-four or yer coach-an'-six?"

"I want none of your cheek, Sall-o'-the-Wig."

"Faix, iv ye had some av me cheek, yer lordship, id wud add to yer purty looks," she said, with a grin, as she pointed impudently to his thin, sallow jaws.

"Come, Sally," said the farmer behind the counter, "here are your letters and papers, and be off with you."

"Thank ye fur nothin', Barney Doolan. I'm goin' past yer wife's, by-an'-by. Would ye loike me to tell her that I lift ye a-coortin' the Widdy Mahon?"

With this parting shaft, which raised the laugh against Doolan, whose "better half" was noted for her jealousy, Sall-o'-the-Wig departed, chuckling.

"Id's a good business you'll be afther doin', Masther Pat, I'm thinkin'," said one of the labourers, who was smoking a pipe in a corner. "Yer clothes must cost a hape av money; they're mighty fine, intirely; an' yer goold chain an' watch, too."

"When you reach Dublin, Mahon," put in a

farmer, "you might send us the real truth about James Hinson's escape."

"Hinson—Hinson!" said the ex-schoolmaster, as his eyes shifted and his lips whitened, "what should I know about Hinson? I travel in the wine and tea trade."

"Thin, manin' no offinse," remarked the labourer, knocking the ashes from his pipe, "I've seen many a thraveller in me day, bud niver any to get on so soon an' be as well trated as yerself."

"Mother," said Mahon impatiently, "I must be off. I am late for the Knockbeg train, so I must post all the way to catch one at Limerick. You can send my things after me to my lodgings in Lower Gardiner Street; but I want that twenty sovereigns I gave you to keep for me."

Kate Mahon paled at the mention of the money, and she interlaced her fingers one within the other.

"Pat," said she, "let me keep the money for you; I can give you a couple of sovereigns for your journey."

"No—no," was the answer. "I want the twenty pounds for a special purpose. You go fetch the cash and I'll attend to the shop."

She went towards the parlour with faltering steps.

"Do hurry," he exclaimed impatiently.

As soon as the woman was gone her son leaned against the counter, and, playing with the ornaments dangling from his watch-chain, he said :

"Look here, fellows, leaving this place has made a man and a gentleman of me. My mother used to trample on me and domineer over me when I lived here, under her thumb ; but now, I tell you, I can make her run at my beck and call, for she is afraid of me. Yes, afraid of me," he repeated, with a scowl, as the smoking labourer laughed ironically.

"Afraid of you, you sneaking jackanapes !" said Ned Delaney, who stood on the threshold with a bandage round his head. "Who is afraid of *you*, or a dozen like you ?"

"My mother is, for one ; and I'd advise you not to call names," added the ex-schoolmaster, with a malignant sneer. "I know a thing or two, I can tell you."

"If you know a thing or two," said Delaney, advancing a step nearer to him, "you must know that my hand is heavy, and that blows are stronger than words. Now, jackanapes !"

Mahon grew livid, and, for a moment off

his guard, his green eyes glistened, cat-like, with the hatred he felt. Controlling himself, he forced a false smile, and, shifting his glance from Delaney, he said in an insinuating tone :

"Oh, we're all neighbours, and I don't mind what you call me. Come, shake hands."

"Shake hands with you?" said the owner of Mount Farm, as he thrust his hands into his breeches pockets. "Well, I'd rather not, for I can't tell what dirty work you've been up to."

"You will always have your joke," said Mahon, biting his nether lip. "What a time mother is away. I'll never catch the Limerick train," he added, going into the hall towards the foot of the staircase.

"Come down, can't you?" he called out. "What do you mean by stopping up there so long?"

"In a moment—in a moment!" was the answer from above.

When the woman returned to the shop, her face was crimson from some cause or other. Placing a small cash-box on the counter, close to her son, she said :

"There are four pounds, Pat, which must do for the present, as I have not got the twenty sovereigns in the house."

"Not got any money in the house ! Where is it then, I want to know ?" he said, in an insolent tone.

His mother looked at him silently ; but the cold, stern gaze which used formerly to cow Pat Mahon to abject submission had lost its power.

Was the change in him or her ?

The farmers and labourers laid by their pipes and drinking-glasses, and nodded and winked at each other ; for they had often seen the son cringe and sneak away before his mother's slightest gesture. Now, after his boast to them of her being afraid of him, he would be compelled to stand his ground and show fight. Noticing their meaning nods, his complexion turned jaundice-colour from choler.

"Where is my money ?" he shrieked, banging the counter until the glasses and tumblers jingled.

"Your money ?" said Kate Mahon very quietly. "I have made a present of it to a friend who needed it."

"You lie !" he yelled, as, with uplifted hand, he advanced to strike her.

"What ! Strike your mother ! Not while I

am here, you hound!" cried Ned Delaney, putting himself between them.

"Let her give me my money, then—I want my money."

"Give him his money, and let him go. The sooner you get rid of him the better, Mrs. Mahon."

"I have not got the money to give, Mr. Delaney."

"You've been drinking, have you?" said her son, in a bullying tone. "I'll sell the whole place up, and then we'll see who is master."

"Be quiet, Pat, and let us keep our quarrel to ourselves," said she, with a remnant of her former spirit.

"Look here, Mahon," interposed Barney Doolan, "I'd advise ye to take the four pounds and go, or you'll not see Limerick this side of to-night."

The ex-schoolmaster gave a sullen side-glance at the speaker; but the advice was good, and there was no time to lose.

If he were not at Dublin Castle by to-morrow, who knows whether some other informer, greedy for gain, might not oust him out of the job of tracking Hinson anew? And, on the other hand, if he delayed at Lusmore, might not Hinson have heard in jail who had betrayed him? and then——

Mahon, always a coward at heart, shivered with apprehension at the thought.

"Thank you, Doolan," said he; "you are right. "I must be going. Send my things to Gardiner Street to-morrow" — addressing his mother with a frown—"and if I hadn't pressing business I wouldn't leave the house without my money. Have it ready for me against my return, or it will be the worse for you."

Stamping his foot to accentuate this threat, he took the four pounds out of the cash-box and left the shop.

There was a dead silence for some minutes after his departure, no one wishing to be the first to venture a remark. At length one of the labourers said something about Hinson's strange escape from prison, and this set all their tongues loose at once. Ned Delaney, instead of joining in the discussion, leaned his back against the wall, smoked a pipe, and listened with the air of one highly amused. After the lapse of about a quarter of an hour, the master of Mount Farm put away his pipe, shook himself together, and spoke :

"Mrs. Mahon," said he, "I have something private to say to you. Doolan will attend to the customers."

Without replying, the woman walked into the

parlour, beckoning to him to follow her. When the glass door was closed behind him, to his dismay, the postmistress burst into a hysterical fit of crying. Disconcerted, he tried to soothe her.

"Come," said he, "this will never do. It's not like you to give way to this kind of thing."

"In the cupboard—in the cupboard," she sobbed, "you will find a bottle of whisky. Give me some of it raw—raw."

He reluctantly brought the bottle and poured out a small quantity in the bottom of the glass, and proffered it to her. But she shoved the glass back, and cried :

"Fill it—fill it. What's the use of a drop like that?"

When he had done her bidding she tossed the strong liquor down her throat at a single draught. The farmer stared at her. Kate Mahon had the character of being the most abstemious woman in Lusmore, and there were those of her acquaintances who averred that she was never known to taste spirits under any circumstance.

"That has given me new life," said she. "You are surprised, Mr. Delaney; but my son was right, I have turned to drink."

"I am very sorry."

"Sorry," said she, with a scornful laugh,

"why should you be sorry? Why should you, or anyone else, either care or sorrow for anything that happens to me? You see how the only being in the world, who is bound to me by any tie, treats me. Oh! I heard what Pat said when I was at the top of the stairs, and it's all true. I *am* afraid of him now."

The farmer, who had seated himself at the table facing her, drew back his chair a little. He felt embarrassed at her family confidences, and scarcely knew what he had better say.

"Mrs. Mahon," said he, after a time, "I wonder at a woman of your strength of mind giving way to drink in this weak manner."

"I can't live without it," was the gloomy answer. "I can't sleep at night and I can't get on in the day unless I have whisky. See here, look at my hand how it trembles. I can scarcely hold even this glass without letting it fall."

Delaney rose from his seat, strongly doubting the advisability of telling her what he had come about. The woman directed her gaze on him shrewdly, and then, as if guessing his thought, quietly remarked:

"You need not fear. The whisky only affects my nerves; it leaves my brain clear enough. I know what brought you here. You have a message from the 'master.'"

"Hush! yes," said the farmer, lowering his voice. Then going to the glass door, which divided the parlour from the shop, he opened it and looked out.

The men were still holding an animated discussion at the farthest end of the counter, and Barney Doolan was giving his opinion on the subject of conversation with noisy animation.

"Come here, Delaney," said he; "tell us what you think. Do you believe, after all, that Hinson has sold the cause, and is an informer and a spy?"

"By-and-by. I will be with you in a few minutes." Then Delaney refastened the door of communication, and again advanced to where the woman was seated, eagerly waiting for him to speak.

"They can't hear us, but we must be cautious."

"Yes, yes," was her impatient remark. "What is it? or why didn't Mr. Clarke get off along with him?"

"He says nothing at all about Clarke," said the farmer, taking a letter from his pocket, and casting a glance over it.

"This was brought to my house by a trusted messenger, and in it Hinson says that he will make his way down here, and he wants you to

leave your outer door on the latch to-night, and every night this week, and to put a bundle of hay and some bread and porter in the loft over the stable."

The woman listened in silence.

"The money was sent to aid Mr. Clarke," said she at length. "At the time I didn't even know that the 'master' had been arrested."

"What money?" asked Delaney in surprise.

"Why, Pat's money, of course. And besides that I drew fifty pounds of my savings last week out of the Provincial Bank of Knockbeg, and sent them to Dublin, to a friend on whom I could depend, to employ the money for the purpose of effecting Mr. Clarke's escape from Kilmainham jail. I begin to think that perhaps the—the 'master' may betray us," she added in a suspicious tone.

"Never—never!" interrupted the farmer indignantly. "Hinson is our only hope—the future saviour of Ireland. Why, even here," he continued, clapping his extended palm on the letter spread out on the table before him, "he declares that he has reasons for suspecting that the informer who disclosed all our plans for the spring rising to the Castle authorities must have come from this place."

"From Lusmore?" ejaculated the woman.

"Impossible! All the maps and documents were in my keeping and under lock and key. You could not doubt me; I would give my life ten thousand times told to help the cause."

"Of course no one doubts you; but locks and keys are not much of a safeguard," he remarked. "One of Hinson's principal motives for coming down here just now is to try and trace the identity of the informer."

"Somehow," said she, "I never put much faith in Mr. Gerald Moore; he was always too reserved, and I can't understand his deserting the cause and running off so suddenly to America."

"Now, Mrs. Mahon, don't talk such nonsense," said the farmer, firing up at the doubt thrown at his absent friend. "Gerald Moore is the honestest young fellow under the sun. I saw him off at the Limerick station myself, and he looked very despondent, I can tell you. I'm not surprised at his wanting to break off with us, considering that he believed we were the means of his uncle being killed. I wish from the bottom of my heart," he added, "that the atrocious wretch who murdered the poor Rector could be found, and then, I'm sure, Moore would join us again."

The woman's jaw fell, and she stared at the

speaker, as if he had conjured up some vision before her.

"Lord Almighty!" he ejaculated, "what on earth is the matter with you? How you shake! You are not going to have a fit, are you?"

"Give—give," she gasped, pointing to the whisky bottle.

"Now—don't," he remonstrated.

"Give," she repeated. "I—must—have—it."

Pouring out a small quantity in the glass, he slid it across the table to her; but she shook her head, as she indicated her trembling hand, which quivered as if from an electric shock.

"I cannot—raise—the—glass. Put—it—to—my—lips."

When she drank the spirit, it had an immediate restorative effect on her, and she said apologetically:

"I am subject to attacks of the nerves, but they don't last long."

"I doubt if drinking raw whisky will cure your nerves. Take a friend's advice, and try some milder remedy. Now, if you feel all right again, I will read to you what Hinson says further."

"Hush!" she whispered, grasping his coat-sleeve, "I'm certain I heard a noise in the hall."

With one bound Delaney made to the door, which opened on the hall close to the staircase.

Flinging it back, he looked out sharply. No one was visible. Closing the door again, he resumed his seat.

"See here, Mrs. Mahon," said he, "if I remained long in your company you would make me as nervous as yourself, and I would be imagining that I heard and saw all sorts of ghostly sounds and sights. Now, listen to what Hinson says."

"Go on," said she, clasping her hands, and bending her head forward in an attitude of attention.

The farmer took up the letter, and commenced to read as follows :

"Tell our brothers to work unceasingly, and to be cautious. Organise, organise, but above all *secretly*. The future of Ireland is within our grasp, if we persevere long enough in our plan of silent action. In a movement aiming at the liberation of our country, the notion of winning except through a course of secret policy is the notion of an idiot. I have never been so sanguine of ultimate success as I am at this moment."

He ceased reading, and, folding the letter, put it carefully away into his pocket-book.

"Whenever the 'master' speaks," remarked

the postmistress, "he doesn't waste words, but what he says is to the purpose."

"Ay, he has a head," said Delaney admiringly, as he rose to go. "I must take Moore's place, and keep our men together in the valley."

"You can use my house and what it holds in any way you like."

"We know that, Mrs. Mahon. Now I will wish you 'good-bye.'"

"Won't you take something before you go?"

"No, thank you."

Ned Delaney was partial to a drop; but the sight of this woman's craving for neat spirits had taken away his appetite for strong drinks—for that evening, at least.

When they had disappeared into the shop, the door leading from the parlour to the hall was slowly moved open, and Pat Mahon stealthily put in his head.

"So," thought he, "that's how my money went. I'm glad I missed the car to Limerick, for this job will be worth a hundred pounds to me. In spite of the drink, how sharp mother's ears are. If it hadn't been for the coal-cellar under the staircase, Ned Delaney would have caught me listening."

Part IV.—The Secret.

“ Over dews, over sands,
Will I fly for your weal ;
Your holy, delicate, white hands
Shall girdle me with steel.
At home . . . in your emerald bowers,
From morning's dawn till e'en,
You'll pray for me, my flower of flowers,
My Dark Rosaleen ! ”

CHAPTER I.

SAMSON AGONISTES.

WHILE Ned Delaney was smoking his pipe in Kate Mahon's shop, a jaunting car was rattling along the main road from Knockbeg to Limerick.

The only occupant of this vehicle, besides the driver, was a low-sized, black-bearded man of rather common appearance. He wore a loose slop overcoat of a snuff-coloured brown, and his stubbly black hair was covered, but not concealed, by a soft, low-crowned jerry hat. He had on coarse, gray woollen gloves, and a green shade served to conceal the expression of his eyes.

When the car reached a lonely spot near a thicket, on the outskirts of the valley of Lusmore, the driver drew up and his passenger alighted.

"Remember," said the latter, in an undertone, "to-morrow and the day after you may expect to see me here. If you are not alone, make some excuse to get off a moment to speak to me."

"Are you wise in trusting to Father John?" asked the driver, with an intonation and a manner unusually cultivated for a person of his apparent calling.

"I know well what I am about," was the assured answer. "Kennedy may hate and despise us, but he will never betray us. You promised to tell me of the short cut to his place."

"Yes, there's a brook just beyond the grove, with stones to cross over to the other side. Then, if you keep straight on a bit, you'll soon come to the rear of the chapel-house. Now, brother, farewell."

The car went on, and the man left behind had just entered the grove, when he heard approaching footsteps. Hiding behind the trunk of a large tree, he waited. Presently Pat Mahon appeared, running for his bare life to catch the car, which was fast disappearing.

"Damnation!" he shouted. "Curse the fellow! He's before his time to-day."

Rushing out on the high-road, he ran along,

calling at the top of his voice, but all to no purpose. The carman neither stopped nor looked back. The ex-schoolmaster, in a fury, turned his steps in the direction of the village, without being aware of a pair of eyes watching him intently from the shelter of a tree. As soon as Mahon was gone, the man in hiding peered carefully all round, and then commenced to cross the stream. Notwithstanding his ordinary appearance, there was a certain delicate daintiness in the way he picked his steps lightly from stone to stone to the opposite side.

Then he crept noiselessly along, close to hedges and ditches, through the fields, as instructed by the driver.

A person of common intelligence, noticing his winding, serpentine movements and his frequent halts to look round, must have guessed that it was a matter of great moment to this man not to be seen. He reached the deserted road at the back of the chapel-house without seeing anyone. There was the familiar half-moon window, high in the wall, with its impenetrable blind of green baize which served to baffle the curiosity of the prying villagers.

Would he find Kennedy at home? He could not enter from the back. As there was no door,

he must get round through the chapel-yard. Farther on he came to the large white-painted gate through which the people flocked to mass on Sundays. He shook the bars, and found the gate was locked.

Crouching down, he put his ear to the ground, Indian fashion, and listened. Reassured, he rose to his feet again with a smile of satisfaction. Then he divested himself of his black wig, beard, and green shade, and disclosed the features of James Hinson.

Though a little worn and haggard, his face bore its usual imperturbable, self-possessed expression. He leaned his head against the white bars of the shut gate, and rested a moment.

How strange that he should feel himself thus attracted towards Kennedy! He knew that the proud priest would most likely receive him with scorn and contempt, and might possibly even believe that he had played the part of a traitor to his friends; and yet——

What if he told all to Kennedy? If he told him the whole truth about this, the sole creation of his own brain—this secret organisation which, though still in its infancy, was silently but surely gathering strength and manhood in every capital and country in Europe.

First hastily disposing of his articles of disguise in the loose pockets of his overcoat, he proceeded to search for an inlet to the chapel-yard. A gap in the surrounding hedge answering his purpose, he clambered through and went straight across past the chapel, and entered by the small gate opposite to John Kennedy's lawn.

Here he stopped an instant to collect his faculties, and plan what he should say to Father John. There was no one visible, and not a sound was to be heard.

The chapel-house was apparently deserted by its inhabitants. The glass doors of the bower library were ajar, but the library was empty. The only thing about with life in it was Bride Killeen's Kerry cow, which, having escaped from its paddock, was lying down contentedly chewing the fresh green clover. Drimin raised her large, soft eyes, and looked mildly at the intruder.

Hinson surveyed the rural scene, and then smiled half-contemptuously. The ever-varying beauty of meadow, hill, and sky had but small charm for this plotting, restless spirit; and it was with a feeling half-compassionate, half-wondering, he thought of Kennedy.

"What a waste!" he uttered aloud. "What

a waste ! Such an intellect and such a will to be lost to the world in this dull hole ! ”

Approaching the house, he pushed in the porch door and entered. The kitchen was empty, but on the table there were the remnants of a meal. Not having eaten anything since the previous day, this was a grateful sight. When he had partaken of the food, he made up his mind that he should first go into the parlour to see if he could find materials to write a few lines to Kennedy, and afterwards seek a hiding-place in the fields till dusk, when he might with safety steal towards the Mount Farm. He had already his foot on the bottom of the steps leading to the parlour door, when he was startled by the sound of a voice coming from within. The voice was like and yet unlike that of Kennedy. Who could be with him ? Would it be wise to risk entering without knowing whether friends or foes were inside ? While yet debating with himself, there rang out in accents of anguish the words :

“ Rosaleen ! Rosaleen ! Rosaleen ! ”

Hinson mounted the two remaining steps, and, drawing in his breath, listened. Surely there must be someone with Kennedy ?

Was he on the brink of discovering the secret

so well guarded by O'Brady, Bride Killeen, and Sally Breen ?

Impelled by an overpowering impulse, and forgetful of his usual discretion, he pushed the parlour door in about half an inch. But just on the threshold he hesitated. A sentiment of delicacy held him back from intruding unannounced. He tapped on the panel with his knuckles and then waited an instant, but there was no response.

“Rosaleen ! Rosaleen ! Rosaleen !” again that name thrice repeated, with indescribable longing and pain, broke on the stillness.

Hinson hesitated no longer, threw the door wide open, and advanced into the room.

To his amazement there was no one there but Kennedy.

He could scarcely credit the evidence of his own senses. Surely, there must be a second person concealed somewhere ? But where ? There was the table in the centre with its book-stand and open volume ; there was the piano covered with loose sheets of music ; there was the sofa with its leopard-skin rug, and Bride Killeen's old-fashioned writing-desk in the corner, with a magazine flung carelessly on it, but not a token of human being other than the

priest. Whom, then, had Kennedy been talking to ?

Father John was standing at the front window gazing straight before him, his rusty black soutane hanging in loose folds about his gaunt form, and his iron-gray hair, wet with cold perspiration, clinging in damp locks on his brow. There was something unnatural in the expression of his profile as seen by Hinson, whose intrusion he seemed not to notice.

“ Hist, Kennedy ! ” said Hinson in a marked tone.

There was no answer ; but after a moment the priest let his head drop forward on his breast with a movement eloquent of despair, and then, with a long-drawn sigh, he uttered the words :

“ Lost ! lost ! lost ! ”

“ Kennedy ! Kennedy ! ” exclaimed Hinson as he advanced a step nearer.

Father John raised his head and slowly turned it towards the speaker, who recoiled as he saw the awful agony depicted on the priest's face. A dark cloud hung like a pall over the marked, stern features ; the veins on the forehead stood out as thick as cords ; the mouth was drawn and haggard ; the eyes shone with a lurid light, and the deep lines on the temples and at the angles

of the mouth seemed multiplied a thousandfold by the strain of some intense mental suffering.

“Good God! Kennedy, what is wrong?” cried Hinson, shocked beyond measure, and forgetting himself entirely at this woeful sight.

Father John’s lips moved, but no sound came forth.

“Kennedy, rouse yourself. Be a man. What is wrong?”

“Who calls me Kennedy?” said the priest at length in a hollow tone. “I am not Kennedy—I am Samson, and my enemies have overthrown me. Ho! ye Philistines,” he shouted in a sudden frenzy, as he threw out his clenched hands, “ye have blinded me; but I’ll drag down the pillars of the universe, and crush ye in the ruins!”

Hinson thought it must be some very terrible trouble indeed which could upset Father John to such a degree. Stepping nearer to his friend, he laid his hand lightly on the sleeve of his soutane, and said in his mellowest and most soothing voice:

“Kennedy, be above them, whoever they are, and whatever they have done. A man with a soul like yours can well afford to scorn the malice of such pigmies as try to injure you from sheer envy.”

Instead of heeding these words, the priest pointed one long, lean finger into vacancy, and said :

“Look ! look ! See how the horses struggle —ah—ah, they’re past the bridge ! Beware ! Beware the open space ! Oh, God ! they’re over ! Down—down they go ; the fatal waters are rushing—rushing. I come ! I come !”

With these words he threw up his arms and made a pace forward as if about to fling himself through the window. Hinson caught him and dragged him back.

Father John turned fiercely at bay, and for the first time the eyes of both men met. Gradually there blazed within those of the priest the awful and unmistakable light of insanity. Hinson, appalled, released his hold and tried to escape ; but it was too late, for Kennedy, with a horrid, mirthless laugh, stretched forth his hand and clutched him by the throat.

“Ha !” he screamed, “I have you ! You are the fiend who opened the sluice and let the waters go ! Rosaleen ! Rosaleen !” he cried. “At last ! at last ! you will be avenged !”

Hinson could no longer remain in doubt. He knew now the secret of the chapel-house.

Kennedy was MAD!

The lean, claw-like fingers closed tighter and tighter round Hinson's neck; but with a desperate wrench he freed himself from the powerful grip, and darting towards the fire-place tried to snatch up a weapon of defence. Before he could catch at anything the priest, quick as a sun's ray, was on him again, his rage redoubled by resistance.

"Help, help," cried Hinson, as he felt the pressure of the iron thumb on his throat choking him.

With a despairing effort he managed to loosen slightly the clasp of those horrid nails which were digging into his flesh.

"Fiend!" muttered the priest. "Fiend! You had no mercy on them. I will have none on you."

Then there was an interval of silence, broken only by the breathing of these two men engaged in a deadly struggle, one fighting for dear life, the other with the superhuman strength and fierce hatred born of lunacy, striving might and main to crush his imaginary foe.

With ear on the alert for the faintest approaching sound, with eyes strained on every movement of Kennedy's, Hinson's subtle brain

kept working—working. His delicate, soft fingers had insinuated themselves underneath those of Kennedy sufficiently to allow him to respire, and like a serpent he twisted his lithe limbs round the priest's body ; but all in vain, for Father John's muscles seemed of granite and not to be moved.

Was there no one coming ? Would no one ever come ?

“ Not dead yet, not dead yet ! ” muttered the priest. “ How many lives has the demon got ? ”

Again his grasp grew tighter and tighter, as if closing by the action of some powerful screw, almost displacing the supple fingers which fought so frantically for breathing space.

“ Help ! help ! ” gurgled Hinson, as his blonde face became blackened and convulsed from the fearful pressure, and his eye-balls, bleared and red, started half out of their sockets. He tore wildly at the hands which held him as in a vice, and, for a moment, contrived to gain a slight respite.

Was no one coming ? Would no one come until all was over ?

He felt he could not hold out much longer, but, though his life was quivering in the balance, his restless brain kept running on his grand

scheme. He dead, what would become of his organisation? Would it collapse, or would some upstart leader come after him, and reap all the benefit of what he alone had planned and toiled for in struggle, and hazard, and privation?

This last thought had such a sting in it, that it caused the blood to course freshly through his veins and inspired him with renewed vigour. Gathering his strength, he again twined his supple limbs round the priest's body, and fought, tooth and nail, to free himself.

The birds, as they hopped from branch to branch outside, merrily twittered their evening song, and the last rays of the dying sun, streaming in through the parlour window, flooded with a golden radiance the forms of the two men, who no longer seemed like human beings but wild beasts, who, writhing and panting, strove to tear each other to pieces.

At length, Kennedy, enraged by Hinson's persistent endeavours to get loose, flung his whole weight against him with an abrupt movement, and bore him backwards to the ground.

Down, down—lower and lower—until he lay

quite flat. Then Father John knelt on his chest, and, as he laughed the dreadful laugh of a maniac, his hot breath almost scorched the brow beneath him.

But even in this supreme moment, the priest's victim shuddered and closed his eyes, to shut out from his sight the dire expression of woe and suffering which distorted the stern face bending over him.

"Rosaleen! Rosaleen!" cried Kennedy, as his sinewy hands tightened round his victim's throat with a last fatal clasp. "Avenged! avenged!"

Hinson, exhausted, let his arms fall beside him, and struggled no more.

END OF VOL. II.

